

The Approval of One

Scripture: 1 John 3:1 – 3 & 1 Thessalonians 2:1 – 4

June 21st, 2020

I am going to delay our look at Jesus' Parables until next week and for Fathers' Day, let me share this message about fatherhood. Let us open this message with a question: What comes to mind when you ponder the word 'FATHER'?

Several people within a church had experienced a poor relationship with their father so they asked the pastor to stand in as a loving father figure. They asked the pastor to do a blessing over them. The blessing asked for forgiveness for the ways a father can hurt his children by setting expectations that are too high or being distant from their children or failing to offer tender presence and affirmation of their children. The blessing was pronounced with delight, admiration, and abundant love by the pastor. As the blessing was shared by the pastor, those that asked the pastor for the blessing were visibly moved and they wept before the loving father figure. They realized how they still needed to receive such words from a loving father.

The scripture repeatedly speaks of God as our Father. This idea reshapes our image of our father. God is our eternal father who has lavished on us a perfect love which makes us his children. We are the children of God. Our identity as God's sons and daughters grounds us in an uncertain world to him.

Let us be honest, our world is fear inducing and at times, a dangerous place. With the coronavirus and the pretesting that is taking place, we are an anxious people. In our reading from 1 John, he says – *We are children of God even though what we will be has not yet been made known.*

Facing ever-present challenges, all we can truly count on is that our Father, God, loves and provides for us and will never stop doing that!

When everything is said and done, God says through the inspired word of John – we can be certain we will be like Him. So in the midst of our anxieties, our wounds, and our failures; our good Father in heaven speaks a blessing of inexhaustible love. God insists we belong because He made us his children!

When a legendary composer, Giuseppe Verdi, was young and hungry for approval, he had a great drive for success. When Verdi produced his first opera in Florence Italy, he stood by himself in the shadows of the stage looking at one man's face in the audience – the great Rossini. It mattered not to Verdi if everyone else was cheering or jeering for him. The only person Verdi wanted a smile from was Rossini. Verdi wanted a smile of approval from Rossini, the master musician. Oh, he got not only a smile but a standing ovation from Rossini!

Whose approval do you seek? Do you seek approval from a parent, a boss, a child, or a love interest? For me growing up, I sought out approval from one person – my father. My father was a man from the 50's and he was not a hugger. But his smile from under a large nose could light up a room and light up a small boy – ME! I often felt like Verdi, seeking the approval of one person – my father, Anthony F. Plocinski or who was called by everybody – Tony. My father was a workaholic and often when I would play basketball in junior high school and high school I would look in the stands to find him but he was not there because he was working overtime to make some more money for the family. I longed to see him smiling at me. But there was always one place where I saw my father always – at church. He was the spiritual center of our family. I have to be honest, I receive more furrowed eyebrows than smiles in church as my father would try to control three rambunctious boys, but every so often my father would shot a smile my way. I would beam a smile right back him! Oh, I long to see that smile once more. My father passed away in 2000. He had his faults but one of them was not loving his children.

For Paul in our second scripture reading, there was but one answer to who he was seeking approval from. He wrote – *We speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts.*

So what does it mean to seek God's approval? At the very least, it involves two things – #1 – turning from the desire for the applause of others. #2 – allowing God's spirit to make us more like Christ, the One who loved us and gave Himself for us.

As we yield to God's perfect purposes in us and through us, we can anticipate a day when we will experience the smile of His approval.

The approval of the One who matters most – God's approval! Happy Father's Day.

Let us pray:

God, teach us more about how you are our father. May we experience and know your care.

Father, it is far too easy to seek the applause of those around us. It is far too easy to desire their praises. Help us to lift our eyes to You, O God, the One who knows us best and loves us most. AMEN.

And now, please listen to a poem from Katie Cronin (Al & Bonnie Rae's daughter)

