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Where Will We Go, Today?

The Reverend Dr. John A. Dalles

Psalm 86:1-10; Matthew 10:24-39

Today being Fathers' Day, someone is going to wonder, "John, why in the world did you pick that particular passage of Scripture to read today of all days?" I can understand the question, but the answer is: "I did not pick it." Far from it. In fact, it was selected for us — as the Gospel reading in the Revised Common Lectionary. It is an extremely odd set of verses for today, when we are honoring our fathers — which, of course, is one of the Ten Commandments: "*Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.*" (Exodus 20:12)

That is a central fixture of our belief, as it was in Jesus' day. So when Jesus says, "*I have come to set a man against his father ...*", and, "*Whoever loves father and mother more than Me,*" we wonder: What is Jesus doing? Is He setting aside the Fifth Commandment? Or is something else at the core of what He is saying? Does it mean something greater than the Fifth Commandment is now at work in the lives of people who would follow Jesus? Let's try thinking along those lines. When we do, what emerges?

First, there is that passage about the sparrow. "*His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me,*" is how the beloved hymn says it. Even more, God's eye is on people. Jesus calls God, "Father." So, we call God, "Father," too. We begin the Lord's Prayer: "*Our Father ...*" Jesus doesn't call God, "The Sparrow Keeper," like the guy on the rooftop with the cage full of pigeons. God, caring for, feeding, training, and letting those birds fly — and when their flight is done, welcoming them home again. All the time, God's eye is on them. But Jesus doesn't call God, "The Sparrow Keeper." Jesus calls God, "Father." It is an even closer relationship than we might have anticipated.

God cares for those He has made. God secures their lives. God watches them grow. God provides for their needs. God tends them when they have broken wings. God loves them. This Father's Day, remember: The Father's eye is on the sparrow. The Father's eye is on you.

Jesus says more: "*I have come to set a man against his father ...*" What does Jesus mean?

Sometimes, as we grow, we go in a way that is different from what our father may have had in mind for us — whether you say that a person "rebels," or that a person "finds" herself or himself. Scripture promises, "*Train up a child in the way that he or she should go, and then, when they are grown, they will not depart from it.*" But, what if a person was raised with no faith, or with wrongly placed faith? And then, at some point, they came to understand that Jesus is Lord of all creation, and of that person's very own life? If their father did not know it, did not believe it, or did not want to hear it, who would be the greater authority in that person's life? It is a real-life dilemma that some of Jesus' first disciples faced.

Do I do what I have been taught to do? Or, do I do what Jesus calls me to do?

You may never have had to make that choice. Your father may have been a deeply committed Christian — who made sure you got to know about Jesus; who brought you to church; who taught you to pray; who set an example for you of Christian servanthood; who lived his faith in such a way that it inspires your own. So you are not set against your father. You are in sync with your father. On Father's Day, just thinking about that is a joy. I rejoice with you if that is the case.

Apparently, it was not the case for some of Jesus' listeners. So, if you had to depart from your father's beliefs and convictions in order to be faithful to Jesus, then you have done what they had to do. You have acted according to what Jesus teaches.

Now it is my sincere hope and prayer that your father will come around to your own faith understanding — that Jesus is Lord, and grace is to be found in Him. Hopefully, these truths will have a warming influence upon your father.

And then Jesus says, *“Whoever loves father and mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.”* In other words, *“Whoever loves Me more than their father and mother, is worthy of Me.”* On this Father’s Day, you have memories of growing up, and of your father, that are part of who you are now. You may do things the way he did them. You may say things the way he said them. You may tell his same “dad jokes” and get the same inordinate amount of pleasure doing so, that he did. You may do things the way he taught you, from home repairs to driving a car. You may work hard, like he worked. You may sacrifice for your children, the way he sacrificed for you. Do you know that, in all those ways, you can love Jesus even more?

What Jesus did and said are a part of who you are now. You do things the way He did them. You say things the way He said them. You may even remember some of His turns of phrase and get the same pleasure saying them that He did. You may do things the way He taught you, even the ordinary stuff of life. You may work hard like He did. You may sacrifice for others, the way He sacrificed. On this Father’s Day, if you have memories of your father that parallel your love for Jesus, it is good and right that this is so.

When I was a kid and the weekend rolled around, there was something my father used to say that brought joy to my heart, and it still does. He would look at me and say, *“Where will we go, today?”* And whatever we did, whether we went to the beach, or the store, or the backyard, or just running errands, it was the whole sense of sharing in it that was so very special.

“Where will we go, today?” Somehow, I can still hear it, and see him smiling when he said it.

“Where will we go, today?” Somehow, I can also hear Jesus saying that — with a sense of love and joy and anticipation of what will unfold in the next moment, and the next hour, and throughout the day.

“Where will we go, today?” Wherever you go — whatever you and Jesus do — hold before you the wonderful truth that Jesus is sharing it, with you. Amen.