

Date: June 20, 2021

Series: *Communion*

Title: *The Father Heart of God*

Text: Psalm 103

Preacher: Mark Adams

My three older grandkids all love LEGOS. Thanks to the generosity of grandparents and uncles and aunts, they have sets that they have assembled, all over their rooms. Of course, LEGOS can be pricey but that's okay because my wife is the queen of deal finding. Sue is always coming across unopened LEGO sets in Thrift Stores or used ones that friends are selling at a great price, so whenever we head to Norfolk for a visit, we usually have some "Lego-gifts" to take with us.

And its so much fun to put them together---together---a great way to spend time with your grands. The last time we were in Norfolk, Nathan and I spent an entire day assembling a Spiderman Lego vehicle. And I got a kick out of how Nathan and I would work together to finish the job. Each set comes with a booklet, but instead of written instructions, there are pictures to follow. It's kind of like assembling IKEA furniture. So, I make sure my bifocals are angled correctly, look at the picture, find the pieces and assemble them like the picture. Nathan would watch me assemble a few parts and then he'd say, "Let me do it grandad." And he'd pick up my assembled section, take it apart and then, relying on what he saw me do---he would put it together again. This method required twice the time, but it gave me twice the fun!

Those hours spent assembling Legos came to mind this week as I thought of Father's Day, because dads need a picture to follow as they raise--- "ASSEMBLE" --- their little ones. Of course, moms do as well! All parents need an example to follow, like Nathan followed mine as I followed the "picture" in the instruction manual. And God gives us that "picture" of parenting. He is the example all moms and dads can and should follow if they want their children to grow and mature.

With that in mind, take your God's "assembly manual" and turn to the 103rd Psalm. As we read it, note the parenting style of our Heavenly Father and if able, I would ask you to stand as we read in respect for God's Word.

Psalm 103:1-22

1 - Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise His holy name.

2 - Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all His benefits—

3 - Who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,

4 - Who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion,

5 - Who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

6 - The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.

7 - He made known His ways to Moses, His deeds to the people of Israel:

8 - The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

9 - He will not always accuse, nor will He harbor His anger forever;

10 - He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

11 - For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him;

12 - as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

13 - As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him;

14 - for He knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust.

15 - The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field;

16 - the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.

17 - But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear Him, and His righteousness with their children's children—

18 - with those who keep His covenant and remember to obey His precepts.

19 - The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all.

20 - Praise the Lord, you His angels, you mighty ones who do His bidding, who obey His word.

21 - Praise the Lord, all His heavenly hosts, you His servants who do His will.

22 - Praise the Lord, all His works everywhere in His dominion. Praise the Lord, my soul.

Okay, let's go back and review this picture that David gives us of God's parenting style. As we do, I want to point out three aspects of our Heavenly Father's "person assembly process," three things that make Him the perfect example to follow when it comes to parenting.

1.) First, God is a PATIENT parent.

Look at verse 8 where David says, ***"The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger."***

This is a quote from something Moses had written 500 years earlier. It's recorded in Exodus 34 and comes from the time Moses was up on the top of Mt. Sinai conferring with God, receiving the Ten Commandments. You'll remember that while this was going on, down below the Hebrew people were having a party characterized by drunkenness and immorality. These people whom God had just delivered from bondage in Egypt, these people who had walked between the parted waters of the Red Sea were expressing their "gratitude" to their Heavenly Father by worshiping an idol of a golden calf made from discarded jewelry.

When God told Moses what was going on he came down from the mountain and angrily shattered this first copy of The Ten Commandments. God was angry as well, so angry He told Moses He wanted to destroy the people. When God said that Moses fell on his face and appealed to God's grace. He gave it. God said He would not NUKE those Hebrews party animals. But then He said, ***"I'm through with them Moses. I won't destroy them, but I will no longer go with you, Moses. You guys are on your own."***

Moses again asked for mercy for the Hebrew people and once again God gave it. He took Moses back to the top of Mount Sinai, and before He began dictating a second copy of the Ten Commandments, God passed in front of Moses proclaiming the words of our text: ***"The Lord...the compassionate and gracious God, is slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."***

Now, understand Moses didn't get God to change His mind here. God knew what the people would do before they did it. He knew what Moses' response would be. So, this was a teaching time for Moses, a time for our Heavenly Father to show him and us His great grace-filled patience. I mean, like any parent, God does get angry. But He puts up with a great deal before reaching His boiling point. He is patient with us.

And earthly parents should follow His example. We get mad at the things our kids do but we must learn to control our anger and be patient with our little ones. God knows they will be far less likely to come to us when they need our help if we are easily angered. And of course, we want them to come to us! God is a patient Father and all parents must be as well.

Tony Dungy's dad obviously patterned HIS parenting after this aspect of God's character for he was a patient parent.

Dungy shares an example of when he realized this about his dad:

"My dad was usually a quiet, thoughtful man. A scientist at heart and by training, Wilbur Dungy loved to be outside, enjoying the scenery. Fishing allowed him time to contemplate, to listen, and to marvel at God's creation. My dad used fishing to teach his children to appreciate the everyday wonders of the world God created—the sandy shoreline, the dark, pine forests, the shimmering water---and the abundant wildlife.

The lessons were always memorable, whether we caught a lot of fish or not. Although we fished countless times together throughout our lives, one particular day stands out in my mind. It was a summer day in 1965. Summers in Michigan are beautiful, with comfortable temperatures and clear, blue skies. I was nine years old, and my brother was five. My dad had taken us fishing at one of the many small lakes around Jackson. On that day, my dad was teaching my brother and me how to cast. We were both working on it, mostly in silence, until my dad's voice finally broke a period of stillness.

'Hey, Linden, don't move for a minute, please.'

I looked back and watched my dad move his hand toward his face. Calm and deliberate, he continued to speak. 'Now, Linden, always make sure that you know not only where your pole is when you're starting to cast'---At this point, I

realized my dad was working my brother's hook out of HIS OWN ear— 'but also make certain that you know where everyone else is around you.'

I learned something about proper casting that day, but I also learned something about patience. Years later, when I got hooked myself, in my hand, I realized how much it hurts. Remembering my dad's patience that day when Linden's hook was caught in his ear, I finally understood the importance of staying calm and communicating clearly."

Indeed.

God is patient and as parents we must follow His example.

2.) God is a FORGIVING parent.

Look at what David says in verses 9 & 12: ***"He will not always accuse, nor will He harbor His anger forever...as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."***

How many times have you gotten angry with your children and in your anger reminded them of their past failures? We've all made that mistake. Well, God doesn't parent like that. ***"He will not always accuse nor will He harbor His anger forever."*** God has a long fuse when it comes to His anger and a short memory when it comes to our sins.

This is good because as Psalm 130:3 tells us, if God kept a detailed record of our sins, none of us would ever be able to stand before Him. In Isaiah 57:16, God says, ***"If I kept throwing up in your face your past failures, if I chose to retain an angry disposition toward you because of your sin...your spirit within you would grow faint before Me. You would wither up and die."***

Can you imagine how this would be? I would go to God for forgiveness because I'd done something wrong. I'd say, *"I did it again, God. I doubted Your provision and tried to take care of things in my own strength. Oh, please cleanse me from this sin and give me the courage to trust You in the future."* And God would say, *"You did it again? That's a vast understatement, Mark. This is the seventy-third time you've done it this week. And I stop forgiving after fifty. Sorry, pal, but you have exceeded My limit."*

Thank goodness God isn't this kind of Father. Once I've sought His forgiveness, He doesn't keep on accusing. He doesn't keep on harboring His anger toward me. He chooses to have a short memory where previously forgiven sins are concerned. The glorious fact is God doesn't treat us according to what we deserve. He treats us according to what we NEED. He forgives us and forgets our sin.

In fact, the psalmist tells us that when we ask God to forgive our sins, He removes them as far as the east is from the west and remembers them no more, an immeasurable distance. But that's just one of the word pictures our Heavenly Father gives us to help us understand the extent of His forgiveness. Let's review some of them.

- Micah 7:19 says, ***"He will trample it under foot and throw it into the deepest part of the sea."***
- Isaiah 38:17 says, ***"He'll put it behind His back where He can't see it."***
- Isaiah 43:25 says, ***"He'll blot it out."***
- Isaiah 44:22 says, ***"He'll sweep it away just like a morning mist that gets burned off by the sun."***
- Jeremiah 31:34 says, ***"God will refuse to remember it; He'll just block it out of His memory."***

My daughter Sarah is potty-training our granddaughter, Emma. And like all kids, Emma has had her successes and her failures. What would happen if after a few failures, Sarah said to Emma, *"That's it Emma. No more second chances. No more forgiveness. I'm not cleaning up your messes anymore. You better start saving because you are going to be spending a lot of money on Depends in your life."* That would be terrible! And of course, she doesn't do that. No parent going through that important training does. They forgive and forgive and forgive---until the lesson is learned.

That kind of unlimited forgiveness is something kids need from their parents all their lives. When we forgive and forgive and forgive we are modelling our parenting after that of our Heavenly Father, Who's mercies are new every morning.

I don't know if you noticed by on January 16, 2013 a man named André Cassagnes died in Paris at the age of eighty-six. You may not know his name, but you know his invention. Fifty years earlier he created a plastic device with a glass screen on which children could draw by turning little knobs. Since the inside surface of the screen was coated with aluminum powder, moving the knobs resulted in drawing images on the screen as an unseen movable stylus scraped away the powder. By turning the device upside down and shaking it, the little black images would magically disappear.

Cassagnes called his little invention "*L'Ecran Magique*," or "*the magic screen*." The Ohio Art Company renamed Cassagnes's toy *Etch A Sketch* and began distributing it in the United States beginning in 1960. Since that time more than 100 million of the little laptop drawing machines have been sold allowing it to be named one of the top 100 toys of the 20th century. The *Etch A Sketch* has made its mark among other classics as the Duncan yo-yo, the Barbie doll, Silly Putty, and Mr. Potato Head.

It's unlikely that André Cassagnes had any idea the toy he created in his basement half a century ago would become so popular. It's also unlikely that he imagined his hand-held creation would provide Christians with such a powerful illustration of grace. Like an *Etch A Sketch*, sin makes its mark on the screen of our lives. The evidence of our disobedience is indisputable. It's not a pretty picture. But when go to God and ask for His forgiveness, He gives it and when He does, the blotches of sin on the screen of our lives are erased and we are made like new.

Our Heavenly Father is patient. He is forgiving. That leads us to another characteristic of God's parenting in this psalm. Did you notice it?

3.) God is a LOVING parent.

In fact, this Psalm is full of proclamations of God's great love.

- Verse 8 says that God is, "***abounding in love.***"
- According to verse 17 God's love for us is, "***from everlasting to everlasting...***"
- Verse 11 says, "***As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him.***"

In these verses the Psalmist is saying that God loves us with an unbelievably great love. It's greatness is seen in the fact that it is absolutely unconditional. I mean, God loves us even if we don't deserve it. As Philip Yancey says, "*There is nothing you can do to make God love you any MORE and there is nothing you can do to make Him love you any LESS.*" His is an UNCONDITIONAL love. It is a love so great we couldn't earn it and don't have to.

And as parents, we perhaps understand this aspect of God's parenting better than most other people. I mean, from the moment we first see our children, as screaming infants with odd-shaped heads covered in blood and cheesy stuff, we love them---period. And even when they keep us up all night crying to be fed or changed, we love them. When their faces are covered with pimples and they rebel against us, we still love them. I mean, most moms and dads understand the concept of unconditional love, because that's the way they love their children. We even love our kids when it's costly to do so and of course it is costly. It costs our time, our sleep our money.

This psalm is a reminder of the fact that this is the way our Heavenly Father loves us and our children need us to love them in that unconditional, COSTLY way. This week I read about a man named Welles Crowther. From the time he was six years old, Welles wore a red bandana. His father gave it to him, explaining the clean white handkerchief in breast pocket was "*for show*," the red bandanna was "*for blow*." Welles took that red bandanna everywhere. When he volunteered with the Empire Hook and Ladder Company at age sixteen, joining his father on the force, he carried it with him. When he played lacrosse for Boston College, he tied it around his head and wore it under his helmet. Even when he took a job as an equities trader, working on the 104th floor of the World Trade Center's South Tower, Welles brought that red bandana with him.

In a culture of starched white handkerchiefs folded neatly in Italian-suit breast pockets, Welles kept his bandanna close. And it was with him on Sept. 11, 2001, when United Airlines Flight 175 exploded into the South Tower, cutting a fatal swath between floors 78 and 85. Several floors below Welles, Lin Yung was blown back by the explosion and couldn't see anything at first because her eyeglasses were covered in blood. When she wiped them off, Lin saw a world of

nightmare: mangled bodies strewn around her, dust and debris everywhere. Lin didn't know how long her luck would hold. Then she saw a young man through the smoke and ash, seemingly more shadow than flesh. He said, *"I found the stairs. Follow me."* Welles led Lin and others down seventeen flights of stairs to where firefighters led survivors down another twenty floors to a set of still-working elevators. But Welles didn't follow them. Instead, he went back up, a red bandanna wrapped around his nose and mouth.

He found Judy Wein in the rubble—her arm was broken, ribs cracked. One of her lungs was punctured. Welles called out: *"Everyone who can stand, stand now. If you can help others, do so."* Welles led Judy down the stairs, again to a band of waiting firefighters. And then he went back up. Again.

Welles didn't make it out of the South Tower. Perhaps he never expected to. His body was found six months later, surrounded by the bodies of uniformed firefighters. It's said that he saved perhaps as many as a dozen people that day. He was twenty-four years old.

Now that was an amazingly loving unconditional, sacrificial thing to do, but God's love is greater still. You see, Welles laid down his life for his friends, his co-workers, acquaintances.

But in Jesus, God laid down His life for His enemies. Welles didn't know the people he saved but Jesus knows us. He knows our sin, knows our rebellion, knows all the disgusting thoughts and desires that fill our hearts and even knowing this, Jesus died for us. As the psalmist puts it, ***"God does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him."*** (vs 11)

Welles' red bandana hangs in the 911 museum as a picture of his sacrifice. Jesus gave us a picture of God's great unconditional sacrificial love when He hung on the cross. And the meal we are about to take reminds us of that sacrifice.

COMMUNION