

3.23.2025 Lent 3 (Ephesians 5:1-2)

Through the historic Christian Creeds, we profess our belief not only in a Creator, but in a Father. This morning, using the words of the Nicene Creed, we declared our belief in “one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth...” These words are so familiar that they don’t sound strange. We probably don’t stop to consider the thought that while it isn’t unusual to view the Almighty Creator of Heaven and Earth as the Omnipotent God who transcends creation, it is, on the other hand, quite unusual to use language that speaks of God in personal terms. To speak of His nearness to us as a Father is altogether different than referring to God as the Creator, and this belief in the fatherhood of God is distinct to Christianity and Judaism.

In the Old Testament, references to God as Father aren’t as common as they are in the books of the New Testament, but there are a few very powerful passages identifying God as the Father of His people, Israel. The first passage we come to that speaks of Him in this personal way is found in the book of Exodus, with God commanding Moses to tell Pharaoh, “*Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, Let my son go that he may serve me*” (Exodus 4:22-23). We also find a passage in Deuteronomy that asks the people of Israel this question: “*Is He not your Father, who bought you? Has He not made you and established you?*” (32:6), and there are two passages in Isaiah, that also refer to God as the Father of Israel. Consider this example, “*But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand*” (Isaiah 64:8). God is not only the Creator of Israel, but the Father of His people, whom He called His “*treasured possession*” (Exodus 19:5), the “*apple of His eye*” (Zechariah 2:8).

In the Old Testament, God is not only the Maker of heaven and earth, but the Father of His people, and in the New Testament, it was Jesus who revealed to His disciples that God is not only our Creator, He is our Father. The New Testament example of that truth which immediately comes to mind is how our Savior Christ taught us to pray, “*Our Father who art in heaven...*” (Matthew 6:9), but this is just one of many examples. In the Sermon on the

Mount, Jesus speaks of the way our Heavenly Father cares for us and provides for our every need (Matthew 6:25-34), He assures us that our Father in heaven hears and answers our prayers (Matthew 7:7-11), and in a familiar parable our Lord paints a beautiful picture of God, as our Father, running to us. Running to forgive us, running to welcome us home, running and rejoicing as a Father would when He receives His lost child safe and sound (Luke 15:11-32).

St. John declared, “*Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God!*” (1 John 3:1). As we’ve seen, the truth that God is not only our Creator, but that His people are His children, is found throughout the Bible, and especially in the New Testament. The Anglican theologian J. I. Packer expressed that thought in this way, he wrote, “To those who are Christ’s, the holy God is a loving Father; they belong to His family; they may approach Him without fear and always be sure of His fatherly concern and care. This is the heart of the New Testament message.” So, while it’s true that God is our Maker, the truth infinitely greater and more comforting is that God is our Father, and with that thought in mind let’s consider these words from our Epistle lesson this morning.

St. Paul wrote, “*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children*” (Ephesians 5:1). In life we’ve all seen the way little children love to imitate their mom and dad. Whether it’s a little girl rocking her own baby doll to sleep, or a boy standing in front of the mirror pretending to shave like his dad, children find great pleasure in imitating their parents, and if, as J.I. Packer claimed, the “heart of the New Testament message” is the truth that God is our loving Father, then as His beloved children it should fill us with joy to imitate Him, and only through Christ our Lord are Christians provided with the Perfect Example to imitate.

To any other major world religion, the thought that the creature could imitate the Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent Creator would sound absurd, but to the Christian, God is not only the Transcendent Creator, He is our Imminent Father - who sent His Son (John 3:16), and it was His Son, our

Lord, who told His disciples, “*Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father*” (John 14:9). The Word who was with God in the beginning, who was God in the beginning, “*was made flesh, and dwelt among us* (John 1:14), and through His perfect example we can truly see and imitate God our Father, and as His beloved children “*walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour*” (Ephesians 5:2).

Consider the words of St. Paul, and notice, it’s not God’s power, knowledge, or presence that we’re called to imitate. Instead, as beloved children we are to imitate the sacrificial love of God. *Walk in love*, writes Paul, *as Christ also hath loved us*. Like a little girl studies and imitates her mother, or a boy looks up to and strives to be like his father, we draw near to our Lord, we behold His manner of love, and by the grace of God imitate our Father by walking in love, as Christ has loved us.

Jesus said, “*As I have loved you... love one another*” (John 13:34). Our Savior Christ is the pattern we’re given to imitate. As the Word of God made flesh, He is the Incarnation of love, and as we consider His example of love clothed in human flesh, what we find is the truth that love is not sentimentality, love is sacrifice. St. John wrote, “*Little children, let us love not in word and speech, but in action and truth*” (1 John 3:18). Study the history, study the life of our Lord from the manger in Bethlehem to the Cross on Calvary and what you’ll discover is love, not merely in word and speech, but love *in action and truth*.

Our Lord, who ruled the universe He created from His throne in glory, who reigned in majesty beyond anything we can imagine, expressed His love for the world *in action and truth* when He came at Christmas to be born in a stable, and laid to sleep in a feed trough. The Christ Child grew into a Man who expressed His love for the world *in action and truth* by healing the sick, the blind, and the lame; by compassionately reaching out to the poor, the outcast, and the oppressed; by loving and forgiving His enemies, even from the Cross as He prayed, “*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they*

do” (Luke 23:34), and our Lord’s expression of love culminated in an act of self-sacrificial love when He laid down His life for your sin, for my sin, and for the sin of the world (Hebrews 9:14). Jesus said, “*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down His life for His friends*” (John 15:13), and such love, a love *in action and truth*, is the example set by the Son of God for us - the “*beloved children*” of God.

God is not only the Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent Maker of Heaven and Earth, the Transcendent Creator no creature could imitate, God has also revealed Himself to us, the Almighty God has made Himself known to us as our loving Father, and therefore as His *beloved children* it is our joy to look up to Him, to study the way He loves, and to then to be imitators of God by loving and serving and sacrificing ourselves for the world He gave the life of His Son to save. You know that you’re a child of God, now go live and love like one.