

WELCOME 16 December 2018 – 3 Advent '18 C

Isaiah 9:2-7 & Matthew 1:18-25

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! It is great to have you here. Please stay with us for morning tea after worship...

When I was a child, the Green family lived up the block from us. They had 3 sons: Kelly, Forest, & Hunter. Yes...they did. If they'd had any girls I suspect they'd have named 'em Jade or Laurel...There is actually something called "Hooker's Green"...named after a botanical artist Wm. Hooker...just *no*

I went to school with a young man from the Nail family...his parents saddled him with the first name Rusty...Yes they did.

*For a child is born to us, a son is given to us.
Rule & Dominion will rest on his shoulders.
And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Names are interesting things...What people call us & how we "name" ourselves can have lasting impact. We can spend our lives "living up to/in to" a name we carry & it's a good thing or we can spend our lives trying to "outlive/marked" by something we've been called/named...& it cripples us...becomes destructive.

Everlasting Father...Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, Isaiah let us in on the good news: If you want to know what God the Father is like, look at the Son. Look at Jesus. Jesus is the perfect image of God. The Son is the exact representation of the Father's being & character. Jesus alone makes the Father known perfectly. Indeed, no one can come to the Father except through the Son. And the really good news...He comes even today even for you & for me & for all. He comes to give us His Name: Child of God. He comes so we can experience the Father's love, the Father's grace, the Father's compassion, the Father's power...the Father's presence...always. We'll explore & experience that today...

Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who brings good news,
the good news of peace and salvation,
the news that the God of Israel reigns!
The watchmen shout and sing with joy,
for before their very eyes
they see the Lord returning...
The Lord has demonstrated his holy power
before the eyes of all the nations.
All the ends of the earth will see
the victory of our God.
Is 52:7-10

O Lord Jesus, root of Jesse, you are raised as a sign for all people. In your presence, all human authority & rule is silenced. All nations bow before you in worship. Come, save us, and do not delay. Stretch out your arms and draw us close for your life to fill us, your love to sustain us, and your grace to bring us to the Father. In your name we pray...Amen

3 ADVENT '18 C – CHRISTMAS: EVERLASTING FATHER

FAITH CHAT:

1. Are there brand/labels to which you are particularly loyal OR which you will not buy? Why?
2. When people look at me they see _____

I learned a new word this week: Apronym...any idea what that is? It's about names...so I'll throw some names up on the screen & we'll figure it out. Layne Beachley...world champion surfer. Margaret Court...champion tennis player. Bill Medley...singer & one half of the famous Righteous Brothers. What's an apronym? It's when your name oddly enough describes what you do. Your aptitude approx. equiv. to your name. Brenna's favourite, someone we all know...Adrian Sparks the electrician. But sometimes names cause more confusion/clarity pain/joy. Like this story for instance...a mom went ballistic on social media after an airline gate-agent laughed at her daughter's name...ABCDE.....ab-siddee. Look...In the great name sweepstakes Leonie & I may have made life unintentionally hard for our girls...but even *WE* didn't go there.

Then there's this one...Everlasting Father...especially that Father bit...See...I know some of us have/had great fathers & our memories of them are cherished/joyful. We can look at moment after moment where **THE PERSON** we wanted to talk to/be with was our dad. We praise God with thanksgiving for those men. We still miss 'em & do everything we can to continue to honour them. I'm there...want to be like that for our girls.

But I know that's not always the case...I was reading a testimony of a guy not long ago & he said he was 25 years old before he could pray using the word "father" because of the lack of relationship with his dad...His earthly father had warped his image of his Heavenly Father. I've met many like him. The simple word "father" puts a knot in your gut & pain in your heart...maybe he was never there...always at work on the tractor on the road in the office at the pub. You may not even know who he is (that's a growing reality in the 21st century). Maybe he was an awful person: an addict or always angry abusive...disinterested...felt you never measured up to his standard... You knew to him you were always named failure...disappointment.

Sociologist Vern Bengston...in his book *Families & Faith*, says w/o question, the quality of a child's relationship w/ their father is the single most important factor in that child adopting the faith of the parents. Lots of other factors too...but that's #1. Eric Metaxas...probably the premier Christian Historian of the 21st century says that almost all the famous atheists of the modern era: Freud, Nietzsche, Sartre, Hume, Bertrand Russell, Madalyn Murray O'Hare had one thing in common...absentee father or traumatic relationship w/ their dad...Sigmund Freud wrote, "Nothing is more common than for a young person to lose faith in God when they lose respect for their father." Education, social development, substance abuse, crime... Shortly before his death, the American novelist, Thomas Wolfe referred to this when he wrote, 'The deepest search of life, it seems to me the thing that in one way or another is central to all living is man's search for a Father. Not merely the father of his flesh; not merely the father of his lost youth; but the image of all strength & wisdom, external to his need & superior to his hunger, to which the belief & power of his own life could be united.' A spiritual wound from an earthly father creates a spreading deepening hungering mess in all of life. An earthly father can warp our image of the Heavenly Father....mess us up.

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It's one thing to say Jesus comes to us "Wonderful Counsellor"...that Jesus comes **IN LOVE** - God immersed in our existence...sharing our vulnerability, pain, betrayal, suffering, & death...with wisdom & insight unmatched seeing what makes us afraid - knowing frailty failing fakery...holds us in loneliness sorrow leads us through our darkest hour...assuring us that even though we are sinful & broken beyond comprehension we are loved by God beyond our wildest dreams. It's one thing to say Jesus comes to us "Mighty God" - Mighty Love - Mighty Saviour - Mighty Mercy Mighty Forgiveness — Mighty Compassion – Mighty Sacrifice - Mighty Power unleashed in us...But what is an Everlasting Father when many fathers we see & know...are instruments of hurt & sadness leave us hungering...?

First...we have to do some Hebrew translating...*Everlasting Father* is best understood as Father of Eternity or Author of the Everlasting The sense is that Jesus is the Source/Author/Originator of all eternity...that through him is the doorway the access the gate into forever. Now suddenly we begin to see the glory of what God gives in Jesus Christ...You've heard me say 1000X that very few people actually believe that there's this life & then nothing...that this is all there is. We work too hard to leave a legacy to leave our imprint on history to make a name for ourselves... There's something implicit in being human that understands there's more than this.

Eccl 3:11 - God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end. Humans have forever looked beyond this life & created all sorts of stories & myths & never fully comprehended what was truly ours only in Jesus. But as Everlasting Father Jesus makes it clear that God intends for us to live with him forever. We were not created by God to vanish from all existence & memory. We were created to live in God's presence forever but only in Jesus is that desire that intention able to be fully realized. Jesus says it like this...

"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty...I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will. And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them up at the last day. For it is my Father's will that all who see his Son & believe in him should have eternal life. I will raise them up at the last day." – Jn 6:35-40 Then he says...

"The thief comes only to steal & kill & destroy. I came that they may have life & have it abundantly/to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...My sheep hear my voice, & I know them, & they follow me. I give them eternal life, & they will never perish, & no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, & no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I & the Father are one." - Jn 10:10-11 & 27-30

Everlasting Father means that God has committed himself in the life/death/rez/rule of Jesus to never leave you never change his mind about how much he loves you never fail you never relax his embrace of you never release his hold on your life. Every now & then the truth hits me like a hammer to the forehead...we are so lost, so unable to save ourselves, that nothing less than the death of the Son of God himself could save us. That means you are *not* somebody who can pull yourself together to live a moral & good life & really impress God to love you more than he already does. Only in the fullness of life & the power of his resurrection unleashed in you are you able to live the triumph over the worries & temptations & the besetting sin that plagues you.

Jesus continues to remind us that in him God has been all of the places you have been; he has been in the darkness you are in now...He has felt the struggle you feel today...he's carried the burden you've got strapped to your back...he's grappled the confusion you're dealing with...& more. Because of that...you can trust him; you can rely on him, because he knows & has the power to comfort, strengthen, & bring you through.

And let's not forget...right this minute...what's your greatest need...your deepest longing...that thing that hurts most?
"You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him." Mt 7:9-11 Everlasting Father means we have...at every moment...unlimited generous love ready to drench our very existence...so ask...tell God...He already knows before the thought formed in your head...so ask. Then check this out...

The Lord is like a father to his children, tender & compassionate to those who fear him. For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust. – Ps 103:13-14 Now look... God did not just call us dirtbags...Everlasting Father means we have...at every moment the unlimited compassion of the Father draped around us like a bullet-proof vest... God is not going to take shots at us for our foul-ups & mistakes...God is not keeping score. God is not comparing your spiritual life to mine to yours...& saying you better pick up the pace buddy! That ain't happening!

Do you ache to be special to someone? Do you yearn to matter? Do you long to be fully known & loved...Psalm 139:1-5 & 13-16) Everlasting Father...

When he was struggling with his own sinfulness & his relationship with God, Martin Luther went to his Confessor Jean Staupitz in deep pain wanting to be close to God but afraid of his own brokenness & unworthiness & Staupitz told him to look only in what God has truly shown us...Jesus. "in Christ, 'God has said 'You will find what I am & what I require. Nowhere else - neither in heaven, nor in the earth - will you discover it'".

"Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, & they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'"
Joseph is granted this incredible truth that no one else has yet: Jesus is God, he is human, & he is with us.

Everlasting Father - Isaiah let us in on the good news: If you want to know what God the Father is like, look at the Son. Look at Jesus: the perfect image of God - the exact representation of the Father's being & character. Jesus alone makes the Father known perfectly. Indeed, no one comes to the Father except through the Son And the really good news...He comes even today even for you & for me & for all. He comes to give us His Name: Child of God. He comes so we can experience the Father's love, the Father's grace, the Father's compassion, the Father's power...the Father's presence...always.

Let's pray with that in mind...

Lord Jesus Christ, we await your coming.

Come to us in the gentle strength, the overwhelming compassion, the enduring grace, and the unending love of the Father.

Come to us with your life so that we may live fully in your presence and as you before those around us.

Come to us to send us to the world in your Name...Amen