

3rd Sunday of Advent

December 13, 2015

Isaiah 9:6: "This Child Is... Everlasting Father"

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“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Is. 9:6).”

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

What’s in a name? During the last two Sundays in Advent our appreciation of the name “Jesus” has grown as we have considered other names in the ninth chapter of Isaiah. A name has a content that consists of person and work, and it is a glorious thing to expand our knowledge of Jesus as he relates to us. So far we have considered that He is “Wonderful.” He is “Counselor.” He is “Mighty God.” This morning we consider that **“This Child Is . . . ‘Everlasting Father.’”**

I have to admit to you that out of all the names that we have for Jesus in the Bible, this one confused me the most when I was growing up. Perhaps it is perplexing to you as well. The problem may very well be that we are so used to calling the first person of the Trinity “Father,” that it is hard to call Jesus, normally called “the Son,” **“Everlasting Father.”** We know that the (the first person) Father is distinct from the Son. How then can the Son be called “Father?” It makes no sense if you know the teaching on the Trinity.

But, as time wore on, I discovered that Isaiah isn’t really saying that God the Son is God the Father. He isn’t saying that they are without distinction. Rather, he is doing something quite different. What the prophet Isaiah is describing is a quality or characteristic of Jesus with respect to you and me. It is point of comparison - an illustrative expression. Jesus is not the Father, as in the first person of the Trinity. Rather, Jesus is our **“Everlasting Father”** to give us a picture of his relationship to you and me. He forever acts like a father who only does his very best for the child he loves. The first way to understand this is in light of Matthew 18:2-3, “And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, ‘Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.’” To Jesus we are all little children, and everything is about entering the kingdom.

It is no wonder that when Luther comments on our very text for this morning, he combines the idea of father with king. After all, Jesus does that in Matthew 18:2-3. Luther writes: “This, then, indicates the work and business of the King, not His Person. This name fits no one else. He always increases his reign, He always begets children and rules over them, He always remains the Father, He does not assume the role of a tyrant, His children are always His beloved. This is beyond question the most delightful kingdom.”

With that in mind, we should confront another problem that can be a hindrance to our understanding of the prophet Isaiah. The truth is that there are no perfect fathers in this fallen world. You may have had a good father, but he was not perfect. And, you may have had a bad father. Either way, you can be rest assured that our perception of our earthly father can have quite an impact on what we think about when we consider Jesus as **“Everlasting Father.”** If you have pleasant images of your father, you will tend to have pleasant images of Jesus. If you have unpleasant images of your father, you might have unpleasant images of Christ. Either way, we can’t fully grasp a perfect, forever father. Still, we are to understand that Jesus is our **“Everlasting Father.”**

The way that we can overcome perceptions of imperfect earthly fathers is to accurately define the type of “**Everlasting Father**” Jesus is toward us children who desire to enter the kingdom of heaven. We must know and believe the kind of rule that Jesus would desire to have over us. Is it an imperfect rule? Is it an oppressive rule? No! In Psalm 103:6-14 we read these words:

The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. *As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust* (Psalm 103:6-14).

I want to be careful that I don't minimize the whole thing, but do you remember watching the movie *Finding Nemo*? It is a story about the love and determination of a caring father. It is the story of being lost, and then found. It is a story that illustrates what a father will do in order to rescue his child. In the movie *Nemo*, a clownfish, disobeyed his father Marlin and swam beyond the reef and was suddenly scooped up by a diver and taken away. His disobedience caused him to be separated from his father and there was nothing he could do to get back to him on his own. He ended up in a fish tank in a dentist's office. Everything seemed to be hopeless. But, little did he know that his father Marlin loved him so much that it didn't matter how big the ocean was. He was absolutely determined to save his child Nemo. And so, the father sets out on an incredible adventure to seek and save his son. At the end of the end of the movie, Nemo is found, and at last home with his loving father.

With Jesus, there is certainly much more to it. The point is that despite our sinfulness, Jesus shows compassion as a father shows compassion to his children. He knows that we are nothing. He knows that there is nothing we can do. And so he comes after us by dying on the cross to pay for all of our sins, that we might be his own and live under Him in his kingdom where he leads and protects us forever! He is the perfect father and ruler of us all and promises to always do what is in our best interest.

And with that, we are brought to the next thought that we have only passingly mentioned so far. Not only can we describe Jesus as a father who has compassion, but we can understand him as “**Everlasting.**” That really says a lot. There is a passage in the eighth chapter of John where Jesus emphatically says to all who would oppose him, “I Am!” He is quoting what was said to Moses at the burning bush. Jesus has given his name by which he is to be remembered forever. Not only does it point to God as the one ultimate reality who alone exists without beginning and without end, but he is the life of all the living, and has even ordained that he would deliver us from sin, death, and the devil by giving himself to be sin for us, to die on our behalf, and to even be tempted by the devil himself and overcome in our stead. The content of his name is deliverance.

This everlasting quality of Jesus is designed for us to come to an understanding that is most beautiful. First, we are to understand that love is stronger than death. No matter how hard death may crave us, Jesus died for our sins that we might live in love. Like a child perceives a strong father, Jesus can do anything. Secondly, what Jesus has done is not a mere “flash in the pan.” Rather, it is an eternal thing that cannot be undone. His forgiveness is a forever thing that will never be reversed or overcome by another time of sin. This is not a theological exercise. Instead, what we are to learn is that Jesus is the eternal one, the alpha and the omega, the subject matter of all time and space, and the one who cannot be overcome and changed. His love is eternal. His word is eternal and stands, just like when a good father says he is going to do something, he really does it.

An earthly father does not live forever. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Our relationship with him will never end. And, he is the one who is our Savior, the perfect Ruler, Provider, and Protector of our lives. Again, “he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.” And so, he gently and ever so faithfully is there for us in every way without end. That’s what we mean when we say that Jesus is our **“Everlasting Father!”**

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott