

Lectionary Scriptures  
in message / liturgy:

Psalm 20  
II Corinthians 5:6-10

2,640 words

Additional Scripture  
references:

Genesis 5  
Luke 2:6  
Matthew 3:17

Key songs:

Father, I Adore You  
Abba Father  
MV 138 My Love Colours Outside the Lines  
VU 580 Faith of our Fathers  
VU 296 This Is God's Wondrous World

Additional music:

In A Little While (Amy Grant)  
The Lord's Prayer (Bradley Ellingboe)

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## **I Am Your Father**

I am your Father.

If you read the sermon title in the bulletin, or just now on the PowerPoint screen... yes, you were supposed to hear it in Darth Vader's voice!

That iconic line in Star Wars - The Empire Strikes Back is one of the most famous of all times.

Interestingly, it's one of the most misquoted movie lines of all time. How many times have you heard the name "Luke" in that quotation, as in "Luke, I am your father". The actual exchange is this... Luke says, referencing what Obi-Wan had told him about his father: "He told me enough. He told me you killed him" and then Vader replies "No. I am your father."

That was, of course, the surprise twist. It changed the way we looked at Luke Skywalker and, to an extent, changed the way we looked at Darth Vader.

At that moment, everything Luke thought he new was completely undone. He had to grapple with a new reality - one in which he knew that what he had been told, and had believed for so long, was completely untrue.

So I guess we could call Vader Luke's "hidden" or "unseen" father.

Every family has a story about their lineage. I've somehow become the genealogist for most of the branches of families from which I've descended, and it is intriguing to dig through in search of a detail that either had been marked as unknown, or that somehow didn't quite make sense, and you have the sneaking suspicion there's more to the story.

Genealogical research, nowadays, is made much easier by the copious records found on the internet. In fact, if you have a day or two to waste, digging through records online is a great way to go down the rabbit hole - you start just checking out one detail, and before you know it, the day is almost over.

Some of these hidden or unseen fathers are the big pieces of the puzzle. I'm still tracking down such a detail in Julie's family history. We know there's the story people were told at the time, and then we thought we knew what really happened. Recent research turned up the notion that both of these stories are untrue, and there's a third version that might be more correct - and the relatively new Ancestry DNA service actually backs up that version of the story.

The Bible is also full of stories about lineages. Genesis, chapter 5, is the best known of these. It goes like this:

**1**This is the written account of Adam's family line.

When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God. **2**He created them male and female and blessed them. And he named them "Mankind" <sup>a</sup> when they were created.

**3**When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth. **4**After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. **5**Altogether, Adam lived a total of 930 years, and then he died.

**6**When Seth had lived 105 years, he became the father <sup>b</sup> of Enosh. **7**After he became the father of Enosh, Seth lived 807 years and had other sons and daughters. **8**Altogether, Seth lived a total of 912 years, and then he died.

**9**When Enosh had lived 90 years, he became the father of Kenan. **10**After he became the father of Kenan, Enosh lived 815 years and had other sons and daughters. **11**Altogether, Enosh lived a total of 905 years, and then he died.

**12**When Kenan had lived 70 years, he became the father of Mahalalel. **13**After he became the father of Mahalalel, Kenan lived 840 years and had other sons and daughters. **14**Altogether, Kenan lived a total of 910 years, and then he died.

**15**When Mahalalel had lived 65 years, he became the father of Jared. **16**After he became the father of Jared, Mahalalel lived 830 years and had other sons and daughters. **17**Altogether, Mahalalel lived a total of 895 years, and then he died.

**18**When Jared had lived 162 years, he became the father of Enoch. **19**After he became the father of Enoch, Jared lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. **20**Altogether, Jared lived a total of 962 years, and then he died.

**21**When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. **22**After he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. **23**Altogether, Enoch lived a total of 365 years. **24**Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.

**25**When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he became the father of Lamech. **26**After he became the father of Lamech, Methuselah lived 782 years and had other sons and daughters. **27**Altogether, Methuselah lived a total of 969 years, and then he died.

**28**When Lamech had lived 182 years, he had a son. **29**He named him Noah <sup>c</sup> and said, "He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the LORD has cursed." **30**After Noah was born, Lamech lived 595 years and had other sons and daughters. **31**Altogether, Lamech lived a total of 777 years, and then he died.

**32**After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham and Japheth.

So that's probably the greatest story of fathers ever written. But it's missing one important detail. It pretty much implies (but doesn't state) that God created Adam. It does say that God created all humankind.

So... does that make God Adam's father?

I guess it's a good question, but it's one with a difficult answer. Clearly, Adam wasn't born of God. Adam was created. But can we still apply the concept of fatherhood... after all, a father is part of the creation story of every baby ever born.

Well, except one.

We all know that in Luke, chapter 2, verse 6, it is written of Mary:

*And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.*

So Jesus has a mother, but no father.

Whereas Adam had no father or mother, but was created by God, so in a way, God was Adam's father. Maybe his mother as well.

We get the answer for Jesus later, in Matthew 3:17...

*And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*

So Jesus has a mother, and a father. But the father is God?

This kind of confusion takes a fair bit of untangling.

The idea of the trinity (God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit) is something we're going to explore over the next three weeks. We're kicking it off today, looking at the role of a father (it is, after all, Father's Day) and where that fits into our understanding of God.

The hymn we just sang, "This is God's Wondrous World" comes from what I've always told the choir is the "Great Hymns of the Church" section of the hymn book. It is, of course, better known to many who have been around the church for a while as "This is our Father's World" - somewhat edited and modernized to present a less gendered, less authoritarian view of God.

But if we go back and look at the Hebrew Scriptures, we very clearly find a portrayal of God as a father figure... a loving father, of course, but also an authoritarian God who was to be obeyed by the Israelites.

God is shown as a father, and our Lord, Jesus Christ, does address him as father.

(Well, actually, he addressed him as Abba, which is, essentially, the Hebrew word that would most closely translate as "Daddy" in English - thus the song we sang at first this morning, Abba Father).

Our anthem this morning was, of course, what is known as The Lord's Prayer.

One thing that has always puzzled many people, especially those growing up in the church, is that there are several versions of the Lord's Prayer, and they seem to have different endings, or more accurately, there are those who leave out the last line (notably the Roman Catholic church).

Why? Isn't it taken straight from the Bible?

That's a good question.

The version at Matthew 6:9-13 in my Bible has Jesus telling us to end the prayer at “evil.” A similar one at Luke 11:2-4 shortens it even more by wrapping up at “temptation.”

However, we usually include the line that follows as well, as “For Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, Forever and Ever” before the “AMEN.”

Why?

Two major reasons: One involves how the Bible was handed down before achieving its modern written form. The other points to Queen Elizabeth — Queen Elizabeth I, that is — whose subjects in the 1500s wanted to differentiate the Church of England from the Roman Catholic Church, which had excommunicated her father, King Henry VIII.

“The fact that this (phrase) is not in the Bible is not certain,” says Dr. Timothy R. LeCroy, lead pastor of Christ Our King Presbyterian Church in Columbia, Mo. “This is a matter of debate among biblical scholars. Granted, most biblical scholars will say that it is not original to the text of Matthew. But this is a guess on their part. A very educated guess based on solid scholarship, yet a guess nonetheless.” What is certain, he argues, is that the line has a “very long history” of being used in the early church. For example, the Didache was a much-used manual of morals, worship and doctrine written in 90 A.D. Its text contains the extended version of the prayer, so we know it was used in worship during the church’s earliest days.

In the Bible, it’s common to find prayers that end with what is called a “doxology,” a short hymnlike verse that praises the glory of God. That’s what this final line in the Lord’s Prayer is. In fact, it may have been borrowed from King David’s exultation of God at I Chronicles 29:4-19, which says, in part, “Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory and the victory and the

majesty ... thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all.” So this final line clearly has Old Testament roots. Then why wasn’t it added to the New Testament prayer?

Two millennia ago, history often was handed down by word of mouth before being put into writing. As a result, Catholics living in the eastern half of the Roman Empire usually added the doxology while those in the western half believed the “Our Father” as said during today’s Mass was sufficient. When scholars decided on the final written version, they chose to omit it. Others, however, kept it going out of tradition.

“The text of the New Testament you hold in your hand is based on two different families of manuscripts,” LeCroy explains. “One family is called the Alexandrian and the other the Byzantine. On 99 percent of the New Testament these two families agree. Yet they differ on some points. The end of the Lord’s Prayer is one of them.”

The omission may have been a mistake by a scribe who was familiar with Luke’s version and lopped off the final line in Matthew. Perhaps it was an effort to harmonize Luke’s version with Matthew’s. Or it may have been that those developing the Bible did not want to confuse worshipers who had learned the prayer by ear and were unfamiliar with the doxology. Whatever the reason, Catholics maintain that the Protestant-Catholic split was solidified during the reign of Elizabeth I from 1558-1603, when the Church of England added the doxology to further rid the church of Catholic vestiges. So even though it omitted from the King James Version in 1611, it remains the standard for English-speaking Protestants.

“My preference is to say it because it is the more universal thing to do,” LeCroy says. “In other words, more Christians over the scope of Christian history, and even today, have said it, so I’ll go with saying it. But if the church across the

street does not say it, it's OK, too. It's not something to worry a whole lot about in my opinion."

While there's debate about how the Lord's Prayer ends, there's no debate about how it begins.

"Our Father" is, of course, the address used at the beginning of the prayer.

And we know that in that address, we are addressing God.

The prayer, as Jesus taught us, covers worship, adoration, sin, repentance, justice, and satisfaction of our needs.

Hallowed be thy name...

we praise you and adore you

Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done...

we recognize your authority

Give us this day our daily bread...

we need sustenance to live and we know it is in Your power to give it to us

And forgive us our sins...

we acknowledge our sins and ask for Your forgiveness

As we forgive those who sin against us

we know we are to forgive others

But lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from evil

don't test us too much, and protect us from the evil one

and then, since we're not Catholic...



For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.

Again we recognize your authority, and that you created everything, and it is all Yours.

So perhaps we can sum it up this way. The various Scriptures we've looked at identify God as the creator of everything, and at least metaphorically, that makes God our Father, in perpetuity.

When we sang "Abba Father, here are your children, born of the Spirit and bearing your name" we acknowledged that paternity.

(now, we just complicated it there by saying we're born of the Spirit - but exactly how the Spirit fits in we'll leave on the table for a couple of weeks when we try to wrap our heads around what the Trinity is)

By ancestry, I guess you could say that God is also our great-great-great-how-many-greats-do-we-need-here grandfather because he created Adam, who begat Seth, Enoch, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noah, and you get the idea.

By immaculate conception, he's also the father of Jesus.

And that is why the most important prayer, the one we use almost every Sunday, and the only one we use pretty much exactly as recorded in the Bible (ignoring the debate between the Catholics and the Church of England) begins with those all-important words:

"Our Father"

Does it really matter if we can't identify in exactly what way God is our father?

This morning's Epistle reading from Second Corinthians had a magic phrase in it. That's actually one of my personal favourite Scriptures, and has been for a long time.

I believe verse 7 sums up in one simple sentence how we are to approach the mysteries of the universe, and how we are to reconcile things we don't understand with things we feel called to do.

Verse 7 says, simply enough: "For we walk by faith, not by sight."

We walk by faith. Not by sight.

What we do is based on our faith - what we believe, and what we hope and expect is true.

It doesn't matter if we can't figure out exactly how God might have created Adam, or what happened in Mary's womb, or in what way God might be the Father or Mother of all humankind.

Maybe those mysteries aren't for us to figure out.

Maybe it's our faith that will lead us when our sight can't.

We don't know why, but we do know what.

"Our Father... hallowed be Thy name... Forgive us our sins... Forever and ever."

AMEN.