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Psalm 103
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A Compassionate Father

It seems that Mt. Everest has been in the news recently as record numbers of people have been attempting the summit. In fact, an article recently described how over three hundred climbers were cued up on the slopes hoping to reach the summit. To me that seems like a recipe for disaster.

But climbing Everest at 27,000 feet isn't for the fainthearted. Not only does it take incredible stamina, strength, and endurance, but you need a ton of equipment. Much of which you cannot carry on your own.

You need an expert guide who has done the trip multiple times.

You need someone with even more strength than you.

You need a sherpa.

Not only will a sherpa help carry your gear, but they will know the best routes. They will keep watch over you for altitude sickness, help in an emergency, prepare all of your meals, and even have extra oxygen. The quality of your sherpa could not only mean the difference between a successful summit or not, but also between life and death.

Just as mountain climbers need good sherpas to guide them up the perilous slopes, we need experienced guides to lead us through life. Today we celebrate and honor some of those guides we know as fathers. And we are going to look a Psalm 103 as a guide for fatherhood. Not just for fathers, but for any of us who have direct influence on people's lives.

Would you join me as we read Psalm 103 and paint a picture for all of us and what it takes to be an expert life sherpa.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

It is good to be back. After being sick and then away for vacation over two weekends, I was itching to be back here with you. I so appreciate that our technology team records the sermons and posts them on our website. What a fantastic way to stay connected to our community of faith while we are away. I really loved hearing from many of you as you took in the Pentecost story last week.

A few weeks back, Bruce Armstrong mentioned how this summer I am on preaching through a few of the Psalms. Something that Bruce said really resonated with me...that the Psalms not only teach us about God...but they also teach us about ourselves. The Psalms in many senses are windows to our soul.

Psalm 103 is one of those windows. Written by David, perhaps as a young shepherd boy out in the countryside watching his flocks by night. It is a hymn of thanksgiving and praise with a very clear movement. It starts with praise and ends with praise which is a common pattern throughout the Psalms.

There is self-talk as David literally commands himself to praise God based solely on who God is and necessarily for what God does for us.

Then the focus broadens to humanity and corporate Israel as David paint a picture of godly fatherhood.

The attention shifts then to the heavenly realm and commands its praise of God.

Finally there is a general command to praise the Lord.

I want to focus this morning on part of the text that paints a picture of a compassionate father. The Hebrew word compassionate is *karehem* which means to love deeply with a tender affection and mercy. Breaking it down in its Latin roots we get *Com* which means “together” and *Pati* or *Passion* which means “suffering.” Compassion literally means Suffering Together.

Verse 8 is the high point of the psalm. “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.”

It is a direct quote from Exodus 34 when the Lord confronted Moses “and the Israelites in the wilderness they committed the unthinkable sin of making and worshiping the golden calf.”¹ Even then, we are reminded that the Lord is one who suffers with us in our unfaithfulness with a tender affection and mercy. Because God’s steadfast love never changes and is completely unconditional whether we are faithful or not.

God is one who does not treat us as our sins deserve but forgives them all. As we hear, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” That is pretty far.

And so God , our heavenly Father, is one who heals our diseases.

Who redeems our life from the pit.

Who crowns us with love and compassion.

Who satisfies our desires with good things

Who works to make things right by providing justice for those who are oppressed.

Who doesn’t stay hidden but makes known his ways.

Who will not always accuse or harbor his anger forever.

¹James L. Mays. *Psalms. Interpretation A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 327.

Who is compassionate and gracious...giving us what we don't deserve.

The psalm goes on to say "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion upon those who fear him for he knows how we are formed, he remembers we are dust. Our days are like the grass and flowers of the field. Dandelion seeds blown away in the wind. Unlike the steadfast eternal love of God, we are not here forever, but only for a season...then we are gone.

Yesterday we had opportunity to celebrate the life of Vi Huber. Vi was such a beautiful and gracious person who had been touched by Jesus. And that touch influenced the way she loved her family, sang music, and experienced life in this church. The time we spent with her was short, but it's amazing the impact that each life makes on another.

What would we hope people would say about us when our time on earth comes to an end?

Jesus for one said, "[Keep the main thing the main thing. Keep your priorities straight.] Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more valuable than they?"²

"Which of you if your child asks for bread, will give them a stone? Or if they ask for a fish, will give them a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him?"³

I would love to be remembered as a father who was slow to anger, and abounding in love though I am sure my children could attest that I constantly fall short of that goal.

We can get frustrated and disappointed when our children make choices that we know may hurt them in the long run. We can even get angry. Thankfully, God isn't like that. He hold no grudges. And he always has our best in mind even when he corrects us in ways that may be painful. That is amazing!

When our kids were small, I would encourage them to wear shoes when they went out play. But when they wouldn't pay attention to my advice they occasionally would get splinters in their feet. It was my job to get them out which usually required me to carry our kid up to our bathroom, kicking and screaming. "Daddy, NO!!! Don't do it! I don't want you to get them out. NO!!! Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!!!" It a miracle the neighbors never called Child Protective Services on me based on the screams of terror coming from within our house.

² Matthew 6:25-26

³ Matthew 7:9-11

But my work was always fast. And as soon as the splinter was out, our kids would recompose and say. “Oh, that wasn’t so bad. Thank you Daddy!” And then they’d give me a big hug and a kiss, and then be back on their way playing... barefoot. As a compassionate father, I knew it wouldn’t be so bad, but that it would hurt me to have to get them out.

And so it is with our heavenly Father. God knows the struggles we are going through. And he is holding us all the way through it. Reminding us the pain isn’t going to last forever. We’re going to get you through this. It’s going to be ok!

But isn’t it a comfort knowing that not only does God help remove our splinters...but he also experiences...feels deeply...our pain as well.

So if our Heavenly Father is like this with us, we should strive be like that with each other. And even though we fall short at times, we still reach for the ideal. Not as a way to earn God’s love, but solely in response to God’s fatherly character. Because God is a compassionate father. One who suffers with us.

But what about the what the part of the psalm that says “that Lord has compassion on those who fear him?” One commentator wrote, “Does the psalm’s connection between God’s steadfast love and those who fear the Lord imply that they deserve and earn it by their faithfulness? The psalm gives a twofold answer. Those who sing the psalm know themselves to be forgiven sinners. They do not receive steadfast love because they fear the Lord; they fear the Lord because they have been forgiven.”⁴

In other words, we don’t earn God’s compassion and steadfast love. They are totally free as a means of grace which leads us to want to follow God’s commands in response to God’s goodness.

The final movement of the psalm reflects what I feel is an important role that we fathers play. To direct our children’s sights away from themselves, to look up to the heavens, and acknowledge that we are not in control the universe. God alone is.

Psalm 121 says, “I lift my eyes to hills - where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

He will not let our foot slip - he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord watches over you - the Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all harm - he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore!”

So as imperfect human sherpas, let us train our children now in the paths they should go in life, believing with hope that when they are older they won’t depart

⁴ Mays, *Psalms*, 330.

from it. Let us remember that a compassionate father shares in the suffering of his children. And let us never forget that no one ever displayed this character more than our Heavenly Father who alone is worthy to be thanked and praised.

Amen.