

Sermon 2007 Pentecost 13 (Proper 16)
Text: Hebrews 12:4-29
Theme: "Who's Your Daddy?"

All of us have heard the phrase, "Who's your daddy?" It has two main interpretations these days. The first is "I'm taking care of you and you are in service somehow to me". The second meaning is "I'm beating you at something, and you are totally defenseless against me."

Interestingly, both of these uses are caricatures of how a lot of people see God. Many people see God as our sugar daddy who takes care of us in all situations and we can live however we want as though there were no real relationship there, or they see him as the great and terrible Oz against whom we are totally defenseless.

We're going to see if we can use this popular phrase in an appropriate way to explain God's discipline in our day to day lives. There are at least three things we see about God's discipline in our text from Hebrews:

First, we know who our heavenly Father is because he disciplines us.

Second, his minor discipline in our lives doesn't come close to the punishment he leveled on his own Son at the cross.

Third, because of what was accomplished at the cross, we are a part of God's family.

We know who our heavenly Father is because he disciplines us, but I think that most of the time God's discipline is misinterpreted. Sometimes, that is because we view God's discipline through the lens of whatever experience we have had with our earthly fathers. Their discipline was and is often imperfect at best. There are times when we have been treated unfairly. But there are also times we got away with things because we didn't get caught. Our earthly fathers were not and are not all-seeing and all-knowing.

Many see God only as described at Mount Sinai, the Oz like god, judging and condemning. Of course the truth is that our sins deserve that! We don't deserve correction, or education or gentle guidance—we deserve wrath and punishment. Let's be honest. We are not mystified by our sin. We know full well that what we are choosing to do is hurting ourselves, hurting others

and hurting God. It is not that we are unaware. We just don't care.

So we gamble, just like we did with our earthly fathers, trying to get as much sin in as possible before the wrath falls upon us. But that is not how God reveals himself to us. That is not the way God works. Why does God discipline us? According to Heb 12:10, "He disciplines us for our good". God disciplines us not as earthly fathers sometimes do, to pay us back for some offense committed or to scare us into making better and probably safer choices, but rather with a view of eternity in mind. He disciplines us in the context of the eternal relationship we have with him.

Hebrews goes on to say, "For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." God demonstrates who he is through his discipline. Is he the wrathful and terrible oz like god of Mount Sinai? Yes, to those who are not his children – to the sheep outside his fold, to those who have chosen to turn their backs on him and live life the way they want.

But not to his children. For us, his children, he is the master teacher, bringing just enough pain into the equation to correct the behavior, to cause the ah-ha moment, to get us to look in another direction and learn something about ourselves and something about him.

And remember that the discipline our heavenly Father applies to us is nothing compared to the punishment he put his Son through on the cross. Our sins do not deserve discipline, but punishment. Sin, in any amount, in any way (thought, word, or deed), deserves not discipline but punishment; an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth. Don't act as though sin is a mystery to you. You have heard the 10 Commandments. Sin earns death. If you choose to sin, then you choose death and there's no hiding from God like you could from your earthly father. And that's why Jesus came!

Blood had to be shed to pay for our sin and his blood shed on the cross fulfills the first covenant and ushers in the new covenant. Through Christ's blood shed on the cross and his soul damned to hell, our sins are forgiven—all of them, once and for

all. Sometimes earthly fathers get a little carried away in their discipline because they take the sins of the children personally. Sometimes earthly fathers can even be abusive because they get so caught up in the emotion of correcting the children. But there is nothing emotional about this. This is all a neat, legal contract. One life and soul of God for the lives and souls of his children. That's it. The emotion is only in that he would do it for us.

The cross shows our heavenly Father's love for us. We sin as though it were of no particular consequence and yet he still loves us enough to lay those sins on Jesus.

Once, when God had had enough of the bad behavior and sinful choices, Moses stepped in between God and the people at Mount Sinai, and begged God for another chance. So now, Jesus is the mediator (the one who stands between us and God) in the new covenant. Because of Jesus, we are adopted into God's family and he is our Father now and forever.

Because we have been adopted into God's family he is truly, in every good sense of the word, our daddy. We receive the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. The God of the universe looks

after us in every way. God continually feeds us with nourishment greater than any earthly food we can hope for in this life and at the same time provides us with all the earthly nourishment we need as well. We are legally connected to God through the cross and the blood of Jesus and spiritually connected to him through Word and Sacrament.

Who's your daddy? The cross gives us the answer. Our daddy is the one who loved us so much that he was willing to die for us and now he guides us and leads us and teaches us so that we can have the joyful lives he wants for us. He cares for us in every physical way and he nourishes us with his own body and blood. He washes us clean in Baptism and teaches us with his Word. Our daddy is the one who will not give up on us even when we have given up on ourselves, even when we feel as though everyone else has given up on us. Our daddy is the God of Heaven and Earth who once moved heaven and earth to save us and will not be detoured from having us now. Amen.