

June 21, 2026 – Matthew 10:21-33

If I were going to make a list of scripture readings for Father's Day, today's Gospel lesson would be at the bottom of the list. In fact, no, that's not true. It wouldn't be on the list at all. I wouldn't even consider using today's Gospel lesson for Father's Day, if it hadn't been appointed in the lectionary.

But here we are. On Fathers Day. A day when we celebrate fathers, families, and the blessings God gives through them. A day filled with cards and cookouts, phone calls and family gatherings. A day in which we come to church and hear Jesus say, *"Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death."* Happy Father's Day.

But, of course, we have to remember: Christ does not shape His message around our holidays. Instead, He calls us to see every holiday, every celebration, and every part of life through His Word. And, actually, when we do that, we find that this Gospel reading might just be exactly what we need to hear today.

We often think of family as the place where we find peace. Safety. Unconditional acceptance. God certainly intends families to be places of love and care. Scripture repeatedly speaks of the blessing of faithful fathers and mothers, obedient children, and households that fear the Lord.

But Jesus refuses to sentimentalize family. He reminds us that even this great earthly gift has been scarred by sin. And the hard truth is that families were broken long before Jesus ever spoke these words.

The first husband blamed his wife for his own sin. The first brothers ended with one murdering the other. Jacob and Esau, for a time, became bitter enemies. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. David's own son tried to usurp his father's throne and have him killed. Throughout the Scriptures we find families wounded by jealousy, pride, selfishness, anger, and unbelief. Sin has never respected families.

So, Jesus isn't saying that He came into the world to make happy families miserable. Rather, He came as the Light of the world. Whenever light shines into darkness, those who love darkness resist it. Sometimes that resistance comes from strangers. Sometimes it comes from governments. And sometimes it comes from the people sitting around our own dinner table. That's what Jesus is preparing His disciples for.

Some of you may know exactly what He means. Because there are plenty of Christians whose parents cannot understand why their children take God's Word so seriously. There are husbands and wives who must worship alone because their spouse has no interest in Christ. There are parents who grieve because their children have abandoned the faith in which they were raised. Around the world there are converts who have been disowned by their own families because they confessed Jesus as Lord.

Jesus never promised that following Him would preserve every earthly relationship. Instead, He tells us the truth before it happens. He prepares His disciples to remain faithful even when faithfulness comes at great personal cost.

And that truth is uncomfortable, especially on Father's Day. We would much rather believe that if we simply love one another enough, every disagreement can be solved and every family can stay together. But Christ teaches us that there is something even more important than family harmony. There is faithfulness to Him.

And Jesus doesn't say this because he values families less than we do. Quite the opposite. He was eternal Word through whom this world was made. He was the eternal Word who told Adam and Eve, *"A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh."* He was the eternal Word who made the very concept of families for our good. Christ values families more than we can ever know.

But Christ values something else too. He values eternal life more than temporary peace. And sometimes the most loving thing you can do is confess the truth, even when it creates tension and conflict.

A parent who lovingly calls a child to repentance may not receive thanks for it. A husband or wife who insists upon holding preaching and God's Word sacred may be misunderstood. A Christian who refuses to compromise God's Word may disappoint people he dearly loves.

The Gospel isn't offensive because Christians enjoy arguments. The Gospel is offensive because it exposes sin before it announces forgiveness. It kills before it makes alive. It tears down our pride before it rebuilds us in grace. And as I discussed just last week, the old Adam never enjoys hearing that. The old Adam will rip a family apart before he will confess his sin.

Thankfully, though, this isn't the whole story. Because the same Gospel that sometimes divides earthly families also creates the deepest, most important family the world has ever known. It's the family in which Jesus teaches us to pray, "Our Father."

By nature, sinners have no right to call God 'Father'. We are rebels, criminals, and commoners who have no right to address the King with such confidence. Yet because Christ has redeemed us, because He has washed us in Holy Baptism, because He has forgiven every sin by His blood, we have been adopted into God's own household. And so, we are sons and daughters of the King. Christ is our Brother. And the Church is our family.

Look around this sanctuary. So many of us are unrelated by blood. We're people from different backgrounds, different occupations, different generations. Yet we kneel together at one altar. We confess one faith. We receive one body and one blood for the forgiveness of our sins. We call upon one heavenly Father. No human organization can create that kind of family. Only the Gospel can.

And it leads to something incredible happening to our earthly families as well. In this Church, we hear God's Word to us. And that Word teaches husbands to sacrifice themselves for their wives. It teaches wives to submit to their husbands. It teaches children to honor their parents. It teaches parents to raise their children in the fear and instruction of the Lord. It teaches us all to repent quickly and forgive generously. The Gospel rebuilds what sin has broken.

And that, most of all, is why our Gospel lesson today is one that speaks directly to fathers. It speaks to everyone, of course. But it speaks especially to them.

God has entrusted you with an extraordinary calling. And your greatest gift to your children is not financial security. It's successful career. It's not athletic ability. It's not a family inheritance. Those things may all have their place. But they cannot give eternal life. The greatest gift a father gives his children is Christ.

Now, that doesn't mean you'll always succeed in that calling. A great many faithful fathers have watched children wander from the faith. Just as many faithful children have watched parents reject Christ. Faith cannot be inherited like eye color or a family name.

But fathers are called to confess Christ anyway. To pray with their families. To bring their children to hear God's Word. To forgive when their children have sinned. To ask forgiveness when they have failed. To place Christ above every earthly priority. That kind of faithfulness may not always be appreciated in this life. But it's never wasted.

After all, our Lord knows exactly what rejection feels like. His own brothers didn't believe in Him. His hometown rejected Him. His own people handed Him over to death. Even His closest disciples abandoned Him. He endured betrayal from friends, rejection from His people, and abandonment by those He loved. And on the cross He cried out, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

He entered the deepest loneliness so that you would never be alone. He was treated as the outcast so that you would be welcomed into the Father's house. The only begotten Son was rejected so that rebels would become beloved children.

Jesus never promises that faith will make every earthly relationship easy. He promises something far better. *"Everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I also will acknowledge before My Father who is in heaven."*

One day every Father's Day will come to an end. Every earthly father will eventually lay down his work. Every family gathering will someday finish. But there is one family that will never be divided. One household that death can't touch. One Father who never abandons His children. One Brother who has conquered death forever.

So today we give thanks for faithful fathers. We pray for struggling fathers. We remember fathers who have died in Christ. We ask God's mercy for broken families. We pray for those whose faith has cost them dearly within their own homes.

And above all, we give thanks that through Jesus Christ we have been brought into a family that nothing, not persecution, not rejection, not death itself, can ever tear apart. For in Christ, nothing will separate us from the love of our heavenly Father. Amen.