

**Sermon Notes of  
Assistant Pastor Laura Urista's Sermon on June 19, 2016  
"The Best Father's Day Gift"**

**[In today's sermon, "The Best Father's Day Gift", Assistant Pastor Laura Urista shares personal stories about her dad that help reflect how God the Father loves each one of us as His special child with such deep and affectionate love.]**

Notes:

Introduction:

- Father's Day has always had special meaning for Laura.
- She was born on Father's Day.
- At the time of her birth, her dad had moved away from North Carolina to Ohio to start a new job.
- Her mom had been advised by the doctor not to travel, so she and her four children Sandy, Bruce, Debby and Brian remained in North Carolina, near most of her dad's family.
  
- The day Laura was born, Dad's sister, Aunt Bea, called Dad to let him know he had a new baby girl.
- But Laura was born with low birth weight, jaundice, lung trouble and needed blood transfusions.
- The doctor was afraid she wouldn't make it.

Special bond:

- That was the beginning of a special bond between her, her dad and our heavenly Father.
- Her dad told her later that he had prayed so hard that day, about how much he wanted to see his new little girl that he dedicated her life to God if He would let her live.
- Obviously God answered his prayers!
- Dad told Laura that she was the best Father's Day gift he ever received.
  
- Growing up, all of the kids had nicknames:
  - Sandy was "Skumpy"
  - Bruce was "Rufus"
  - Debby was "Pumpkin"
  - Brian was "Mr. Magoo" (not because he had vision problems but he was into a lot of crazy trouble as a kid!)
  - And Laura's was "Lollipop."
  
- As a little girl, Laura loved to hop on her Dad's lap and listen to his stories, or hear him sing or whistle songs.
- They didn't have much money, but the family was rich in love.
- In many ways, their mom and dad showed them how deeply they loved each of them.

### The family moves:

- When Laura was about two years old, they moved from Ohio to her mom's hometown in North Dakota, near her Grandma Olga (Dee Dee).
- Grandma Dee Dee was a very sweet Christian lady.
- She attended the Baptist church in town, but she believed every church helped the town and so she donated to all of them.
- Her example has been an inspiration to our family over the years.
- In many ways, Grandma Dee Dee was Laura's hero by really showing her what it means to show Jesus' unconditional love.
- She showed Jesus' love in action, rather than preaching at her about a bunch of rules Laura wasn't quite living up to.
- Well, Grandma Dee Dee also loved to listen to religious radio programs back in the early 60s, and she introduced her dad to a radio program that eventually changed all our lives.

### Dramatic religious influence:

- At the time her parents owned a hotel and café in town.
- Because of his newfound beliefs, her dad suddenly stopped serving pork, bacon and shrimp, he took out all the cigarette machines, and he even closed the place on Saturdays – the busiest day of the week!
- People around town began to think her dad was crazy.
- Finally her dad sold the hotel and café, packed up Mom and us four youngest kids, and moved us over 1,000 miles away to a place where we had no friends, no relatives and Dad had no job or prospects for work.
- It reminds her of a TV sitcom song – you may recognize it: *“Well the first thing y’know Dad’s acting kinda weird, the church folks said ‘Hey move away from here. They said East Texas is the place you oughta be’ so we loaded up the truck and moved to Big Sandy.”*
- Like Jed Clampett on “The Beverly Hillbillies” Dad left his comfortable life because of his newfound wealth...spiritual wealth, that is!
- Laura always admired her dad for his zeal to do what he believed God wanted him to do.
- One reason they moved to Big Sandy was that her dad wanted his kids go to “God’s school.”
- Laura went to Imperial School, the church’s private school in Big Sandy, and later in Pasadena until it closed at that time in 1974.
- Her Dad was teaching photography and industrial arts and again found himself unemployed.
- When Laura’s parents went to register her in a public junior high, her dad started chatting with the principal, who asked “So what type of work do you do?”
- When Dad answered “I’m an unemployed industrial arts teacher,” the principal said “Stay right here...we need you!”

### Life's not perfect:

- Laura has a lot of stories of her dad being blessed with a job or opportunity that he never dreamed of, and those made a lasting impression on her young mind.
- Her dad had miraculously survived a fighter plane crash in the ocean during WW2 and a terrible truck accident when Laura was growing up.
- Her dad demonstrated his faith and love for God by the way he lived.
- But sometimes it seemed to her that her Dad cared more about being right with God and keeping the letter of the law rather than he cared about showing mercy and affection to his family – especially his kids.
- As a teenager, there were times when Laura thought her dad was unfair, out of touch, and basically clueless about life as a teen.
- She knew he loved her, but somehow her dad became distant and stricter in her teen years.
- Instead calling her “Lollipop” it seemed Laura was more often “young lady” or if he was really mad he would pull out all the stops and use her middle name... “Laura Charlene!!”
- Laura guesses everyone has that experience to some degree.
- But she remembers one time she had been away for three weeks SEP in Minnesota.
- She was so excited to see her dad again – all she wanted to do was give him a big hug and have him welcome her back home.
- But all her dad seemed to notice was the pink nail polish she was wearing.
- “Take that off right away, young lady!”
- Evidently, the church had banned makeup again.
- But where was her big hug? What happened to “Lollipop”?
- It seemed the Law had gotten in the way of their relationship.
- After her high school graduation Laura moved away from home to attend Ambassador college in Pasadena.
- At the end of junior year of college, she married her husband, Juan, and a year later their son Tim was born in 1985.
- When you have kids of your own, you really start to appreciate the sacrifices your parents made for you.
- And a few years later their daughter Tawny was born,

### Her father's death:

- At this point in her life, Laura really wished she had gotten to know her dad better.
- She wished she could get back to that special relationship of “Daddy” and “Lollipop.”
- Unfortunately, that was just about that time that her dad exhibited the early stages of Alzheimer's disease.
- She felt so cheated.
- Here Laura was finally at a point in her life when she wanted to spend time with her dad and get to know him better.
- She actually wanted to hear all his stories again and wanted him to tell her kids those same stories.

- But it was too late. At first dad was just confused, forgetting what he was talking about and even who he was talking to.
- But Laura soon realized she'd never get a chance to have a real conversation with her dad again.
- Her mom took care of dad for as long as she physically could, but eventually he had to go into a nursing home.
- The last time Laura saw her dad alive was in the summer of 1995.
- Her whole family got together for her parent's 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.
- By then dad was in a wheelchair and barely able to utter a few intelligible words.
- He died on December 26, 1998.
- So this is the 18<sup>th</sup> Father's Day, Laura has spent without her dad.

### Our heavenly Father:

- But it's never too late to get to know our heavenly Father.
- When Laura's dad passed away she realized that she knew a lot *about* God, a lot of facts about the Bible, but she didn't *know God personally*.
- Like Jesus called the Father "Abba" she wanted to know God as her loving Daddy.
- Rules, regulations and rituals had gotten in the way of her relationship with God, as they had with her physical dad.
- Laura remembered even felling uncomfortable saying the word "Jesus" – as if it's something to be ashamed of.
- She thought, "Why should I be ashamed to say Jesus?"
- If you were drowning, would you be ashamed to yell out "Help—save me!"
- But that's what Jesus means, *Savior*.
- We need to cry out to Him and ask Him to save us, to rescue us from sin.
- In the last few years Laura's been learning what it means that Jesus "came to show us the Father."
- So many of us have been raised with the idea that God is like the bad cop and Jesus is the good cop.
- We think God the Father is sitting on his judge's bench with a giant gavel in hand, ready to sentence us with a terrible punishment if we don't live up to his perfect, holy standards.
- But then we think of Jesus as the kind, merciful, loving healer who came to take our place and suffer the punishment we would have received.
- What's up with that?
- Is God bi-polar or has a split personality like the Roman god, Janus who is usually depicted as having two faces?
- How can the Father be so different from Jesus?

### A better understanding of God:

- As Pastor Tkach said in a recent weekly message "God does not fragment himself."
- We are starting to learn more clearly that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one in nature and one in essence.

**Deut. 6:4 says, “Hear Oh Israel, the Lord our God, The Lord is One.”**

- This is a very important tenet of the Jewish religion, called the “Shema” and it is one of the four passages which they write on their phylacteries:
- Of the word translated Lord {Hebrew – elohim}, Rabbi Seimeon Ben Joachi says “Come and see the mystery of the word Elohim: that there are three degrees, and each degree is by itself alone, and yet they are all one, and joined together in one, and are not divided from each other.”
- And what is the one nature of Elohim...the triune Lord? AGAPE – LOVE.
- LOVE is not aspect of God’s nature or essence, but rather LOVE is God’s core.

**1 John 4:7-8 “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is Love.”**

- Steve McVey quote from his book, “Beyond an Angry God”:

“The most confounding concept in the universe is Love. It is also called and manifested as grace, forgiveness, mercy and care for the other. It is what Scripture calls the ways, means, acts and heart of God toward us. It breaks through every economy of exchange as it is freely bestowed out of its own character. Love is truly what makes the world go round for Love beats as the heart of all Reality, seen and unseen. To know God in Jesus by the Spirit is to know Love and to be known by Love. Love will always be unqualifiable; it cannot be added to, nor can it be set in a balance with other 'divine attributes.' Love conquers all. Oh that we all might reflect today on the deep, deep love of God in Jesus.”

God’s love for us:

- A few days before Mother’s Day this year, Laura’s grand-daughter Heather was born.
- Celestine sent an email with a photo of her a few minutes after she was born. (photo)].
- But here's the photo I first saw of her... (ultrasound of fetus in the womb).
- And this is when Laura first knew that she love her.
- Before Laura even knew that she was a girl or even if she would make it to term, Laura knew that she loved this “little peanut” with all her heart.
- In the same way, God has loved each of us from the beginning.

**Psalm 139:13, For you created me inmost being; you knit me together in her mother’s womb. 14) I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.**

**15) Her frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. 16) Your eyes saw her unformed body; all the days ordained for her were written in your book before one of them came to be.**

- Our Heavenly Father is the same “Abba—Daddy” who Jesus prayed to.
- He is kind, loving and merciful beyond what our human hearts can fathom or measure.

**Ephesians 3:16, I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17) so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18) may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19) and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.**

- Paul says that we would know four dimensions—the breadth, length, height and depth of God's love.
- Paul is talking about the limitless boundaries of God's love – the perfection and unconditional nature of God's love and the power of God's love.
- Paul prays that Christ will dwell in our hearts, **dwelling**, not merely visiting our hearts once in a while.
- Jesus moves in, remains and abides in our hearts. By God's grace, the love he expresses to us and gives us is eternal.

#### Concluding comments:

- The love of God, lived in our lives by our risen Lord, means that we are not alone, we don't live our lives nor will we die alone.
- This is the power of God's love that dwells within us wherein Jesus makes his home with us and in us.
- This is the love of God personified in Jesus who will never leave us, even in the midst of a tragedy, or an accident or an act of violence that devastates us.
- Paul prays in Ephesians 3:17 that we are “rooted and established in love...” – so that God's love is our foundation, our center – the basis of all that we are and all that we ever will be.
- If we truly realize and internalize how deeply we are loved by the Father it will change the way we feel about ourselves and consequently how we feel about others and how we treat them.
- And that's what being a Christ-follower is really all about.
- Showing others the love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit –Elohim in our words and even more so in action.
- Laura loves the advice given by Winnie the Pooh: “Love isn't what you say, it's what you do!”
- Laura then gave a personal example of sharing Jesus' love with a complete stranger – a tow truck driver, who was covered with lots of tattoos.
- As they were towing her car to a repair shop, they began talking about things and religion came up and the man revealed he had given his life to Jesus as a young teenager, but got turned off by the church.
- Laura talked about her position as managing editor of Plain Truth magazine which shows the grace and love of God without the religion.
- He eventually asked her if Jesus still accepted him even though he had ignored Him for so many years. Laura replied, “Yes”.
- After their conversation, he thanked Laura with these words, “Thank you for giving me hope.”

Final thoughts:

- It means the world to Laura that her “Daddy” considered her his best Father’s day gift ever.
- And Laura knows without a doubt that thanks to the immeasurable love of our heavenly Father, who gave us the best gift ever in His son Jesus Christ, she will see her “Daddy” again one day.
- And he will give her a BIG HUG and say “Welcome home, Lollipop.”

**Closing Prayer**