

Fathers. We've all had one.
Might've been good. Might've been great.
Might've been absent from birth.
But you wouldn't be here without one.

Today is Fathers Day and we're looking in the mirror.

Most of you looked in a mirror before you came to church this morning. I'm asking you to look in a mirror during church.

And not a little bathroom mirror, but a full length, warts and all, have a good look, Fathers Day mirror,

And the mirror I want us to use is the Bible. I want us to look at a father and a son. And as we look, to ask ourselves what we can learn. About ourselves. About the fathers we know. About the sons we know. About the relationships we have. Which makes this is a sermon for all of us.

The mirror I want us to look into is the story of a father called David and a son called Absalom. It's a mirror that takes up six Bible chapters and 7,000 words between 2 Samuel 13 and 19.

It would take us about 60 minutes to read it all aloud, so I'm going to give you the highlights package.

<<play countdown video loop>>

First highlight is the birth scene.

In 2 Samuel chapter 3:2-3 read that *Sons were born to David in Hebron: His firstborn was Amnon the son of Ahinoam of Jezreel;*

*3 his second, Kileab the son of Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel;
the third, Absalom the son of Maakah daughter of Talmai king of Geshur;*

That's all we know about Absalom. A 3rd born son, born at Hebron, well before David becomez King.

No more mention of the Absalom until 10 chapters later. This second scene is R-rated. Parental guidance is recommended. We like to think of the Bible as holy, but that's not the reality.

This is the Bible's great strength.

It is honest about human life.

Humans have to live with bad choices, with sin.

Reminds us God loves us and accepts us no matter how badly men and women behave

<<play countdown loop>>

Second scene: Rape of Tamar

This scene opens in a bedroom. It features a beautiful young woman, who is caring for her brother, David's first born son, named Amnon.

It's an awful scene to watch. Tamar is raped by her brother, Amnon. He then humiliates her and literally throws her out of Amnon's house.

Humiliated and sexually abused and distraught, Tamar meets Absalom.

And at this point, we met all grown up Absalom. He's no longer a baby.

He's now an intelligent, astute and sensitive young man.

We know that because when sees Tamar, he joins the dots.

In 2 Samuel 13:20. "Has that Amnon, your brother, lain with you? "

Absalom responds to the rape of Tamar with mercy and compassion.

“Tamar lived in her brother Absalom's house, a desolate woman.”

So here is Absalom, growing into a sensitive and caring young man.
Willing to live with the pain, and share the humiliation of his sister, Tamar.

Which brings us to our third scene.

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Third scene: Rift

This scene opens at a King's table and features a Kings throne. King David no less.

This scene continues the consequences of the second scene, of the rape of Tamar. Because according to 2 Samuel 13:21

“When King David heard of all these things, he became very angry, but he would not punish his son Amnon, because he loved him, for he was his first born.”

This is a verse when I wonder how important one Bible phrase is?
How important is the phrase “King David”: When King David heard of all these things.

Why “King David”?
Why not “When their dad” or “when our father David”?

Instead we have “King”. The use of King and not father, suggests a man acting in a relationship of power, not a relationship of fatherly love.

David is acting as a king, not a father. I begin to wonder if sometimes our jobs and our work and our titles actually stop fathers being fathers?

I also wonder how did King David hear?
Surely not from Amnon. I just can't imagine a son telling a father he had raped his own sister.
Surely not from Tamar, living humiliated and embarrassed in Absalom's house.

So most likely from Absalom. Coming to his father on behalf of his sister, and seeking justice.

And instead finding that his dad was “the King” and that the love for a first born is more important than the rape of his first-born daughter.

We're looking in a mirror. We're looking at a father and wondering what we can learn about ourselves and our relationships.

What can we learn from a powerful king, who refuses to deal with a tough and nasty problem in the family, say to us today?

Now sometimes when you are watching scenes from a movie you get to fast forward in time. So let me fast forward to another father son Bible story.

<<play countdown loop>>

Fourth scene: Prodigal returns.

Just like the previous scene, this scene also opens with a father. Luke 15:

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

Now take a moment to think about this scene. It's a scene set in, back in the day, in Ancient Israel.

In Ancient Israel, men don't wear trousers. Instead they wear long, flowing, robes. Sort of like dresses.

How many men here have tried to run in a dress?

I have. Just once. It was my last year at highschool, I was being a bit of a larrikin and I swapped uniforms with a girl. She wore my trousers and I wore her skirt.

And then our School Principal arrived, I suddenly realised that you can't run with a dress on.

Not unless you hitch the dress right up. And that when you hitch it right up, you run the risk of exposing your undies.

And here in Luke 15 the father runs. Hitches up his long robe and runs the risk of exposing his undies.

Jumping to the next verse.

22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

In this scene, we have a son wanting to opt out of father/son relationship. *Verse 17: I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men*

So a son who wants to swap a father/son relationship for a working/professional relationship. I'll be one of your hired men

And a father who refuses. Refuses to step into a professional and a working title.

A father who risks public humiliation and who shows public emotion, because he wants a son he can treat with compassion.

Which brings us to the fifth scene.

<<play countdown loop>>

Fifth scene: Absalom returns

In this scene, Absalom has been absent for 5 whole years. No Fathers Day for this family. And David knows it. We see that in 2 Samuel 13:49. "And King David longed to go to Absalom."

David might miss his son on Fathers Day, but David does nothing. He's not running down any public roads with his skirt hitched up to embrace Absalom. He's a leader and a king and his son has been estranged from the family for 5 years and he does nothing.

Instead this scene opens with Joab. In Chapter 14. A long time family friend. Who's willing to interfere in another family's business and try to patch things up. The scene unfolds in Chapter 14. Joab talks to David and David agrees.

21 The king said to Joab, "Very well, I will do it. Go, bring back the young man Absalom."

23 Then Joab went ... and brought Absalom back to Jerusalem. 24 But the king said, "He must go to his own house; he must not see my face." So Absalom went to his own house and did not see the face of the king."

And it's back to that Bible phrase again. The king, the king. But not father or David. So Absalom can live in the same city, but can't come and visit.

Time rolls on and same thing happens - 10 verses and 2 whole years later, and once again Joab has to interfere. Talks to David and David finally agrees to see Absalom

So in 2 Samuel 14:33, 7 years, 7 Fathers day since Tamar was raped : *the king summoned Absalom, and he came in and bowed down with his face to the ground before the king. And the king kissed Absalom.*

“The king” “the king” “the King.”

Surely this was the time to be father and son.

Instead David is hiding his emotions and he’s hiding his vulnerability and he’s hiding his compassion and his desire to nurture. David’s an absent dad. Too busy working at being the king to be a father.

And remember we’re looking in the mirror. We’re thinking about ourselves and our relationships. And so we might be starting to turn this story into a prayer.

God help the fathers we know be like the Prodigal Father and not the King David

And it’s at this point in the story that things really begin to unravel for David. That’s another whole movie. It includes Absalom mounting a leadership coup. In the fighting, Absalom is killed. And only then do we discover that David has emotions. As it says in 2 Samuel 18:33

The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!"

And finally we find a king living in a father and son relationship. And we wonder how the story would’ve ended if David had done this while Absalom was alive. What would have happened if David had cried over his daughter Tamar? And if David had cried over his relationship with Absalom?

And if David had acted differently for 7 Fathers Days? And we wonder why do so many humans wait until people are dead before they get honest with their emotions.

Conclusion.

We’re looking in the mirror. And it’s a tough story.

We’re looking at fathers. Seeing the damage that’s done when fathers hide behind their work and their careers. When they hide our emotions and refuse to act as fathers and take action to deal with family conflict and secrets.

We’re looking at sons. Wondering what turned a sensitive young Absalom into a rebellious and cruel leader of a coup. We’re wondering about what it means to be a chip off the old block.

We’re looking at ourselves as Christians. We wondering what type of relationship do we have with a God we call Father?

Do we have an image of God as acting like King David acts here in this story? A king. Distant. Remote. Unavailable.

Or do we have an image of God as acting like the Prodigal father acts?

Eagerly watching out for each of us.

Ready to make the first move.

Ready to run to us and risks humiliation for us.

Desperate to nurture, to kiss and touch.

Ready to party, to celebrate and create joy.

A fathers day Bible story.

A challenge for us to look honestly in the mirror.

To consider how we parent.

Reminds ourselves that God loves us and accepts us no matter how badly men and women behave

And so we move to the communion table. Think on Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

7 rather, just like the Prodigal Father, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,

8 And being found in appearance as a human being,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!