

## *Standing at the Doorstep*

Someone recently told me that she left food on the doorstep of a church family with young children. She realized how hard it must be for them to do their jobs and parent while everyone is staying at home. She thought providing dinner one night might just be an excellent way to support a young family. Her plan was to set down the food on the doorstep, ring the doorbell and make a mad dash for her car before she was spotted.

Shortly after she left their house, she got a text thanking her. She responded as if she had no idea of what they were talking about. Moments later she got another text. It was a photo of her leaving the food on the doorstep and the text said, "I have a doorbell camera."

Full disclosure I have one of those, too. My son got it for me right before I had a knee replacement surgery. He figured it would help my recovery if I could see a video on my phone of who was at my door. If it was a florist with a bouquet of flowers, I might want to unstrap myself from my knee bending machine and waddle to the door but if it was a cable company rep trying to get me to change my service, I could just ignore it.

First century families in Palestine didn't have the luxury of not opening their doors. They lived a village life in which everyone knew each other and the goings on of their lives. They knew the names of their neighbors' sheep. They knew who had built a new piece of furniture and where they placed it in their home. And since they baked their bread in the village oven, they always knew who had fresh bread.

When Jesus was teaching his disciples about prayer, he wanted to make a point about our relationship with God. He said, "Suppose you have company arrive and you don't have any bread to serve them so you hustle over to your neighbor next door (at midnight - Jesus says) and call out, 'Friend, I need some bread. I know you baked some today'." (You see in the ancient world you always served fresh bread to your guests.) "But your neighbor calls out, 'Go away. I'm already in bed. You are going to wake my children.' You know if you keep knocking you will get the bread," Jesus says. Because in a little village in first century Palestine, not only does everyone know the names of your sheep, they know when you've been a bad friend. Your friend may grumble but he will drag himself up out of bed to give you some bread.

Jesus tells his disciples, "If you knock, God is going to open because God loves you. Think about it like this: Would any of you give your child a snake if they asked for fish? Would any of you give your child a scorpion if they asked for an egg?" Jesus is comparing God's love for us like a father for his child. And often, when Jesus talks about God as a father he calls God, "Abba"...daddy. Jesus wasn't comparing God to some patriarchal authoritarian figure. Jesus wanted us to think of God like a daddy...a good parent....as the one who loves us in spite of ourselves...who loves us unconditionally...who teaches us how to ride a bike....who cares for us when we are

sick...who opens the door when we stand in need. The relationship Jesus has with God is the kind that is filled with familiarity and love. The kind of relationship you run to when you are in trouble.

I have never been a father. I've had one and I've been married to one. What I know about fathering I know from watching my dad and my husband. Because of them I can recognize a good father when I see one. A good father comes to the door even if they have a doorbell camera and can see its you. A good father answers the phone when you call even though they have caller id. I want to thank fathers and others today who have opened that door and answered that phone.

When I was teenager I went out with friends one Friday night and got home at 1 a.m. I didn't think anything about it. My parents had never given me a curfew. When I got home I crawled in bed and went right to sleep. The next morning at 7 a.m. my dad crawled in bed beside me and said, "I waited up for you last night. I was worried. I sat in the rocking chair in the living room and wondered if you were in a fatal car accident. Every time a car went passed I went out and stood on the doorstep to see if it was you." "Why were you worried?" I said. "You are supposed to be home by midnight," he said. "If I am you should tell me that. I guess that is the danger of being the youngest child. Your parents get tired and forget to tell you the rules." He smiled and said, "You are supposed to be in by midnight." Then he abruptly changed the subject, "What shall we make for breakfast?" I said, "I don't want breakfast. I got in at 1 a.m., remember." He said, "I lost sleep because you got in late. Now you will lose sleep to spend time with me." I thought he was kidding but he wasn't. I got up and had the most delightful time in the kitchen with my dad. Just the two of us frying bacon and cooking eggs. When I think about my dad, I still smell bacon frying. I imagine my dad standing at the door anxiously waiting for me to return and I feel enveloped in a depth of love that overwhelms me with relief.

My husband was a good father. He had a wisdom mixed in and fine-tuned with a humor that I believe had healing properties. When I got upset with one of my children Bryan would always reframe what was happening in the light of love rather than disappointment. When our adult children would call on the phone, if they just wanted to check in, they would talk to me. But if they needed help, they asked for their father. "Dad, I just got held up at gunpoint." "Dad, I'm in a rental car in New Mexico, I'm late for a meeting and I can't figure out how to open the gas lid cover." "Dad, I need help writing the cover letter for my resume." My oldest son spoke at his father's memorial service and he said that the one person who could help him get through this loss is the very same person he lost...his dad. My children knew that when they arrived at their father's doorstep, physically or metaphorically, that he would open it, love them and help them reframe life within a structure that brought healing and humor.

Can you think of a time in your life when you came to your parent's doorstep, physically or metaphorically? A time of need or desperation? Perhaps you needed

money or someone to hold you or someone who loved you unconditionally just to say, “I see you”.

We all know what a good dad looks like, whether we had one or because we didn't. Jesus wants us to know that God is like a good father...a daddy... “Abba”. Actually, Jesus goes on to say, “If you know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more does God give...?” “How much more?” I like that phrase. God answers the door when we stand at the doorstep asking for help. God stands on the doorstep waiting for us to return. God loves us with an intimacy that lets us know that we are fully seen and deeply held. God brings relationship and healing. Think about that. God will give even more than we give to those we love.

When I was in seminary one of my preaching professors said that most preachers have one sermon and it doesn't matter what they are preaching on they will bring it back to that one sermon point. My husband, Bryan, who also went to seminary, used to say that his sermon was always about the gift of community and mine was about God's extravagant love.

So here I am, once more, preaching the sermon I like best...the one about how much more God loves... the one that invites us to live in God's context and not the world's context....to live in the Kingdom of God and not the empire....to take ourselves right up to God's doorstep and knock...to stretch our hands out to the one who loves us wholly, fully, unconditionally and without bounds....to be enveloped in God's wide welcome and extravagant love.

This is Father's Day and we thank God for those who identify as male who we have gone to when we needed love and understanding...the ones who stood at the doorstep worrying about our safety.

This is Father's Day and I remind you that the one who Jesus called Daddy awaits you with love...extravagant love. Abba God stands on the doorstep waiting. Go there with the weight that you carry, the concerns that immobilize you, or just the part of you that is desperate to be seen and loved. The God of “how much more” is waiting. Amen.