**Summer sermon series on The Apostles’ Creed – June 17, 2012 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Matthew 19:1-6 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**“God created marriage – to provide fathers for children”**

There’s controversy again! Not on the campaign trail, but with the Creation Museum located in northern Kentucky. The museum launched a national ad campaign featuring dinosaurs on their billboards. When you go the museum depicts dinosaurs roaming the Garden of Eden alongside Adam and Eve. Critics are saying that these ads are misleading. The dinosaurs entice children into their museum, where they are exposed to a religious agenda that God created the world in just six days. Every Sunday we have a wonderful opportunity to stand up and give our own public confession of faith. We acknowledge the truth of creation that God the Father created the world in six 24hour days by the power of his voice.

Today we will focus on day six, the day God created land animals, both wild and domesticated. On day six he then crowned his creation with humankind. When we read Genesis 1-2 the Holy Spirit shows us that human beings are not just another animal. They are different. Only man is made in the image of God, perfect, holy, sinless. Only man receives the breath of God, a soul that is accountable to its Creator.

On the sixth day God also created marriage. God provided the perfect formula for marriage: one man, one woman united as one for life. He also created the perfect roles for men and women in the marriage relationship. If we had more time this morning to go through Genesis 2 we would how the LORD teaches us that the man (the husband) is the leader or the head in the marriage relationship, and that the woman (the wife) is the helper to her husband. Although they have different roles, husband and wife gladly use those roles to work together as a team.

Jesus affirmed the institution of marriage in our lesson from Matthew 19. The Pharisees had asked Jesus about divorce. They were referring to a passage in Deuteronomy where the LORD allowed divorce when a woman became displeasing to a man because he found something indecent about her (24:1-4). There were two schools of interpretation regarding that passage among the Jews. One side said that a man could divorce for any and every reason. For example: if his wife burned his dinner, the man could divorce her. The other side said that unfaithfulness was the only grounds for divorce.

The Pharisees came to test Jesus. You see, Herod Antipas ruled in that region. If you remember John the Baptist had been arrested and executed for condemning Herod’s marriage. Herod had taken his brother Philip’s wife Herodias as his own. Jesus’ answer to their question could be used as ammunition against him. If Herod were to hear about it, he could have Jesus arrested.

Jesus redirected the Pharisees to God’s plan for marriage: one man and one woman joined together as one for life. Divorce was never in God’s plan for marriage. But God allowed it because of sin – in the case of unfaithfulness or abandonment. God also created marriage to give blessings to man and the woman in the marriage bond: the gift of sex, the gift of companionship, and the gift of children. Today we will focus on that last gift, children. And since today we are looking at the first article of the creed (and it happens to be Father’s Day) we will see that God creates marriage to provide fathers for children.

There are many models for fatherhood. Some good and some… well, not so good. Peter Griffin and Homer Simpson… probably not good models. God gives fathers direction and purpose in Scripture. Again, if we had time to go through Genesis 2 we would see how the LORD teaches us that fathers are the ones who are the leaders or the head in the family.

With all of the passages in the Bible that talk about the husband as the head of the wife, none of them say, “Be the head of the house by ruling like Bashar al-Assad – president of Syria.” The passages do say things like, “Husbands, love your wives. Do not be harsh with your wife. Treat her with respect. Lead by serving. Be the head of the home and love your wife as Christ loved the Church, who gave himself up for her to make her holy.”

The most important lead role the husband takes is in spiritual matters. The apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:4, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children, instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” Isn’t that what Christian fathers do, from the time they bring their little one to the baptismal font? Christian fathers make Sunday morning a joyful habit. Their children see them reading their Bibles. Their children hear their fathers pray. Christian fathers take the time to sit their little ones (and their big ones) next to them on the couch as they read Scripture together.

“Fathers, do not exasperate your children,” that is frustrate them or cause them to be enraged. Do discipline them! But with love. When their children make poor choices, Christian fathers teach their children about their heavenly Father’s forgiveness. Fathers build up their children. They encourage them. They demonstrate patience and self- control. God created marriage to provide fathers for children.

As I read these things, I realize that perhaps I haven’t been the father God wants me to be, but at least I’m not as bad as some of the other fathers in the Bible, like Noah who was a drunk, or Lot who was a drunk and committed incest, or Jephthah who had to sacrifice his daughter because he made a foolish oath, or King David who didn’t discipline his children at all, or Solomon who messed around with a whole host of women. Perhaps I am not as bad as these fathers… in the eyes of society… but how do I look in the eyes of my Father in Heaven?

Have you been overly harsh with your spouse or children? Does your sarcasm build up their self-esteem or tear them down? What example have you set in the home toward God’s house? Are you pointing your children to Christ? Have you been loving and respectful to your spouse? I know I have not been the husband and father God wants me to be. How about you?

Perhaps there are sons and daughters here this morning who have or had fathers like this. They were not the fathers God wanted them to be. They never took you to church. They never opened the Scriptures with you. So Father’s Day is not a celebration of fatherhood, but filled with resentment, bitterness, and anger. Even if you had a father like that, God still commands us, “Honor your father and mother. Respect them, love them, forgive them.” But Lord, that’s a difficult thing to do today!

Whether you’re feeling like an inadequate father or you’re angry at your father – God the Father, your Creator, is still your Father. He himself is your perfect, faithful Father, and you are his children. He is the Father who gave you life, as we sang in our Psalm this morning… in his wisdom he knit you together. He breathed life into you. You are his creation!

Although you were born into this world a living, breathing creature, you and I were spiritually stillborn in your Father’s eyes. But he had compassion on you, and did not want to see you remain dead forever. The Father had to make a decision, the most difficult decision a father could make… sacrifice his own Son to save you?

Story is told of a father who went sailing off the Pacific coast with his son and his son’s friend. That afternoon, a storm suddenly swept across the ocean. Even though the father was an experienced sailor, the boat capsized and the father, his son and his son’s friend were tossed into the ocean. The father was closest to the overturned vessel and was able to grab a life line. But his son and his friend were both drowning. The father had to make the most excruciating decision of his life: to which boy he would throw the other end of the life line. He only had seconds to make the decision. The father knew that his son was a Christian and he also knew that his son's friend was not. As the father yelled out, “I love you, son!” he threw out the life line to his son's friend. By the time the father had pulled the friend back to the capsized boat, his son had disappeared beneath the raging waves. His body was never recovered. The father knew his son would step into eternity with Jesus and he could not bear the thought of his son's friend stepping into an eternity without Jesus. Therefore, he sacrificed his son to save the son's friend.

How much greater is the love of God your Father that he has done the same for you! For us who were drowning in our sins as unfaithful fathers, drowning in our sins of anger and resentment, in the greatest act of fatherly love this world has ever known, God the Father allowed his Son to take your sins and mine and drown in the depths of hell and sink under the wrath of the Father over our sins and die. God says to you today, “Your sins have been hurled into the depths of the sea, because I was willing to sacrifice my Son to save you.” (Micah 7.19)

The Father has made you his child through water, the water and Word of holy baptism. In baptism he has drowned your sins with his Son’s blood. In baptism he has raised you to life through his Son’s resurrection from the dead. In baptism God the Father has forgiven your sins. He has made you his own dear child. You have a faithful Father who loves you so much, so much that he sacrificed his own Son, his only Son, to save you.

Your Father says to you, “You are forgiven, through my son. You have experienced my love, now…. forgive fathers who have been unfaithful. Let go of anger and resentment, and find a faithful Father in me.” To you fathers who are feeling less than adequate, your Father says to you, “You are forgiven. You are still my child. I will be your Father and help you to be a faithful father.”

This begins with fathers walking with their Father in Heaven. By his Word God the Father reminds you of his plan: he created marriage to provide fathers for children. He created you for this purpose: to be a father to your children and a husband to your wife. Today, on Father’s Day, we will renew our responsibility. We will be leaders in our homes. Our children will see us studying our Bibles. They will hear us praying. We will read Scripture with them. They will look forward to God’s house because their fathers do, too. Husbands will encourage their spouses to explore God’s Word, and together, as God’s family, we will walk hand-in-hand with our Heavenly Father to our Heavenly home.

To God be the glory! Amen!