

Oregon City United Methodist Church
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Series: AND HE SHALL BE CALLED
Sermon: Everlasting Father

Isaiah 9:6

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 64:8-9

Yet you, Lord, are our Father.
We are the clay, you are the potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
9
Do not be angry beyond measure, Lord;
do not remember our sins forever.
Oh, look on us, we pray,
for we are all your people.

Sermon

There was a father of five children who won a present at a Christmas Raffle. One present, five kids. Awkward situation, so he called his kids together to ask which one should get this particular present. "Who is the most Obedient?" He asked. "Who never talks back to mother? Who does everything she says?" Five voices rang out in unison, "You keep the present, Daddy." Oh, fathers.

In this season of Advent, we are exploring the names of Jesus through the Prophet Isaiah. Isaiah was around 700 years before Christ, and he gave us a few great lines that we sometimes find on Christmas Cards, For unto us a Child is born, unto us a son is given. And He shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. And each week, we're taking a quick look at each of these names in turn. This week, however, is the most challenging in my mind. Everlasting Father. It's hard to look at a baby and think, Everlasting Father.

Let me show you why: Here's a little test for you.
Who is the Father of our country? That's easy. George Washington.
Who is the Father of the Constitution? James Madison
Who is the Father of Western medicine? Hippocrates
Who is the Father of evolution? Charles Darwin
Father of modern astronomy? (Gotta go before Galileo) Copernicus
Father of Nursing? Trick question. This Father is actually a Mother. Florence Nightingale

Lets get churchy now.
Who is the Father of the Methodist Church? John Wesley.
Who is the Father of Judiasm? Abraham. (Father Abraham has many sons. . . .)
Father of Islam? Mohamed.

Father of Christianity? JESUS????

It doesn't sound right, does it. How can the Son of God be called Everlasting Father? Is there some confusion in the Trinity? We think God the Father, Jesus the Son, and Holy Spirit. Is it right to call Jesus, Father? When we pray: "Our Father which art in heaven"—who are we praying to? Are we in some way praying to Jesus Christ? In each of these examples, "Father" means founder, author, originator. A person who gives an identity to a new idea or practice or way of life. At first glance, this title of the Messiah is puzzling.

No, there's no confusion here. This is not a statement about the Trinity. This is not saying that Jesus is our Father in a paternal sense. Remember, as I've alluded to in the first two sermons, Isaiah 9 is a political passage. About what is going on in 8th Century BC in Judah. It's about the coming of the Messiah and the government he will establish. "And the government shall be upon his shoulder." These four names of the Messiah are what scholars call throne names. They are names ascribed to a king that speak of the extent of his authority and the nature of his rule. This throne name, Everlasting Father, could also be translated Father of Eternity.

That's what I want to play with today: Jesus Christ is the Father of Eternity. Everlasting Father, Father of Eternity. What does that mean I hear you ask. At the most basic level it's simply affirming that the Messiah will reign forever. As the Hallelujah chorus says, And He Shall Reign Forever and Ever. But on a deeper level, Father of Eternity means that he is the Founder and Author, the Originator of a new way of life. A way of eternal life for all his subjects.

Real fast, you have to recall the historical context in which Isaiah spoke this prophecy. It was a very unsettling time. Let me remind you what was going on. Try to put yourself in the shoes of those believers. Isaiah received his visions during the reigns of four kings of Judah - Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Uzziah was a good king. He reigned for 52 years. Because of an illness, he made his son Jotham co-regent for last 11 years of reign. Uzziah was confined to palace. Jotham carried out the day to day government. What that meant was that when Uzziah finally died, there was a seamless transfer of the throne from father to son. Jotham was a good, steady king like his father. So when Jotham finally died, the people of Judah had enjoyed generations years of wise rule. Then came King Ahaz, who was not at all like his father or grandfather. He had no fear of God. He was incompetent militarily. Self-serving politically. And to make it all worse, he reigned during a time when Judah was facing serious threats to its existence—a possible civil war with Israel and the expansion of the Assyrian Empire. There was a sense many people had that the best days of Judah were behind them. A deep sense of regret and sadness for a past that was lost. Maybe even, among more sensitive, that past sins of nation finally catching up. A kind of paralysis that set in, even among believers.

There was also the feeling that the mistakes being made by King Ahaz were going to be irreparable. That the future of Judah was doomed. There was a lot of worry about the future that sapped all the joy and hope out of God's people. If they looked back they were filled with regrets at what might have been. If they looked at the present, it was pretty messed up. If they looked ahead, they were filled with fear. Into that very unsettling time Isaiah spoke these words—Have hope. The Messiah is coming. A child will be born who will be the Everlasting Father. He will not only reign forever—but he has your past, your present and your future in his hands.

The life of faith is not different now than it was in Isaiah's time. We often look back with regret and other negative, paralyzing emotions. And we look to the present and wonder, what on earth is going on in this world? And we often look forward to the future in fear and worry.

But we don't have to do that if we trust the Everlasting Father. Let's look at this throne name of Christ under three points - and I'll get a little Charles Dickens in on you. Christ is the Father of Eternity Past., the Father of Eternity Present, and the Father of Eternity Future. And we'll see what different that makes in our lives today.

First, Christ is the Father of Eternity Past. When the Bible tells us God is eternal, it means that he is eternal in both directions. He is not bound by time. And yet he carries out his eternal plans in time. Psalm 102:25-27 says: “In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.” What would it mean if Christ was the Father of your Past? What that means for us, and our little lives, is that everything in our past is completely, fully, totally under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. That means if you trust Jesus Christ, if you believe in him and follow him - then you don’t have to allow your past to paralyze your present. Isn’t that true of so many people? Their past paralyzes their present. Regret—whether it’s for roads not taken, or bad choices, or people harmed. Bitterness—for what was done to you by others, or just the hand dealt in life. Regret and bitterness, they paralyze the decisions you make now, the way you relate to God and people. It affects the way you parent your children. It sometimes traps you into constantly thinking destructive thoughts. You got regrets? You got bitterness? You know what? He’s the Everlasting Father. Let him be the savior of your Past.

Jesus is also the Father of our Present. What do you think this would mean? If Jesus was Father of our Present. We could take a few stabs at this, couldn’t we? We’d be more loving, more forgiving, more Christlike? So how are we doing with this? You know how you go to Google and you type in a few letters, and it gives you suggestions on where it thinks your going? Like it tries to finish your sentence or question? It does this by analyzing millions of searches a minute, and it takes the more popular suggestions and tries to guess what you’re asking for based on those billions of queries. For example, If you type in “Why are Christians so”, blank, you’d hope to get something like, Why are Christians so loving. Why are Christians so Awesome? Why are Christians so sweet. But if actually you go to Google, and type in the phrase, “Why are Christians so” you get something else entirely. Here’s a short version of a longer video that shows what happens:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RL2P-GRamWU>

Is Christ the Father of our Present? How do we counter this to the world that sees us as something else? Apparently there’s a lot of work for us to do, me included.

And lastly, Christ is the Father of our Future. Not only do we sometimes allow the past to paralyze the present, and totally mess up the present, but sometimes we allow the future to do the very same thing. You look at your life, your situation, and think—What if? What if this happens? What if that happens? And we get fear. We get worry. There is sometimes so much preoccupation with the future what-ifs that you don’t pay attention to and enjoy the present. You miss what God doing now. If you ask the culture out there, what are Christians preoccupied with, you’d get a lot of answers. Many of which Christ didn’t address. But in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus addresses the subject of worry and he treats it very seriously. He describes it with the same sense of mastery that he gives to his treatment of money. Worry can grip a person just as powerfully as money can. It’s a powerful and destructive spiritual force. It’s an imaginary future that you’ve dreamed up in your head. Do you have worry? Do you have fear? So did Isaiah. They had a bad king. Making bad choices. The enemies were on the doorstep. Death and destruction were a real and imminent threat. And he had the audacity to say that they have an Everlasting Father. I know the world can seem dark right now. But we do have a king that stands above time - Father of our past, Father of our Present and Father of our Future. He’s the Father of Eternity. And that is a present I can share with all my kids. And the family of God said, AMEN.