

+Wesley Addison Smith+  
1917-2009  
Memorial Service  
January 23, 2010

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

“I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees his Father doing...Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”

We do what we see our fathers do.

This is a truth of life. For better or for worse, our fathers hand us their DNA, their parenting style, their philosophies, their mannerisms. “Like Father, like son” is a common phrase. In this case it would be “like father like daughter.”

Your father Wes, was a good one. A strong figure in your life, as we have heard you share today. He built a family, was intensely loyal to it, to you. We spoke together Psalm 46, about the building the mighty fortress. When I picture Wes I picture that kind of solid strength. When Jesus talks about building a house on rock, rather than sand, this is who Wes was.

He was also a kind of father to this congregation. His tenacity and strong-mindedness, together with his love for the church, came together at many points over the course of our history to help create the reality we see around us now. Together with Helen, Wes allowed God to bless His church through an amazing building and property, right down to details such as including a coffee bar in the Narthex, rather than making everyone walk to the kitchen.

I have personally enjoyed his stories of his time with Bell Telephone, his stories of the war, and his salty sense of humor. When Jesus says “You are to be the salt of the earth,” I think of Wes.

I was grateful that he saw, one last time before he died, a vision of this church growing and healthy again, surrounded by children. In his tenacity he overcame great physical odds to be here with us this fall when the children were leading the service, and I know this gave him great joy and comfort.

He may not have always communicated his faith in God, but it was there, and powerfully so. That is another thing that Wes bequeaths to you as a father and grandfather, and that he bequeaths to us all. The stubborn hope that it is here, at a place like Trinity, where the almighty God does his work. Wes’ faith in the church is a witness to us all.

Through thick and thin, through good times and bad, through conflict and many years of doubt, Wes never left the fold. He never left that mighty fortress of our God.

We do what we see our fathers do. May we do as we saw Wes do.

On the other hand, our fathers cannot give us everything. We carry our father's good qualities and bad ones, often through our whole life. Our very identity is shaped by that in ways we don't even see. When we find ourselves acting strangely in relationships with people, we may find we are trying to honor our father or punish our father or escape our father.

Some of us have wounds so deep that reality itself starts to seem scary and unsafe. We can learn to become so self-protective, in a way that says, if I don't look out for myself, no one else will. I have to do it, I have to save myself. So our identity is wounded.

This wounding of our identity might be traceable in some ways to our earthly father, but in the end it is actually a function of our disconnection with the heavenly Father. If we have not experienced a deep connection with God, if we have not known Him intimately as a caretaker, provider, nurturer—like a father should be—then we will live our lives with a great deal of suspicion, anger, and distrust. Distrust of others, distrust of the universe itself, that it is not on our side. That stops the flow of love.

The only way to heal our relationship with the heavenly father—and again, our relationship with our earthly father is only an aspect or sign of that deeper relationship with God—the only way to heal it is through Jesus, through his experience of unity with his Father, of love from his Father, of a deep sense of identity given to him by His Father.

“I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing.” (John 5:19) This is true of us all. But for Jesus and His Father, it goes much further: “For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.” The Father's love for Jesus includes everything. It is so powerful, in fact, that it is itself a third thing, a third person. We call it the Holy Spirit.

Our God is Three, he is Trinity. That is not supposed to be abstract doctrine, but something we experience and live. Wes showed you that. Love is a dynamic, communal, familial relationship, between Father and Son, between Father and Daughter, between Mother and Son, between Mother and Daughter.

Wes, without knowing it, gave you one of the richest treasures you will ever have, that of a love that comes only from God. It came through Wes, but it was from God. And now though faith, by Jesus dwelling in you, you may take ahold of that flow. You can experience the love that is between Jesus and his heavenly Father, who is also your heavenly Father, and who calls you My Beloved Son, My Beloved Daughter.

Any gaps our earthly fathers left in us are filled in by that love, that promise, that reality. By the love of God which he gives to us freely—we are filled up again. We are healed, made whole. We are literally loved into new people. And the best part about it is that we are allowed just to *be*. We don't have to be doers and accomplisners, so much as allowers, receivers, transmitters, of this flow of love.

It gets better: "Moreover," John 5 continues, "the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son." The Father judges no one! Instead the flow of his love is so complete that he passes it to the Son. What freedom. We are not after all in a scary, punitive, legalistic universe, where we have to isolate ourselves and protect ourselves or we might get taken. We do not have to save ourselves.

Rather we have already been saved. We are already loved. We are in a safe, grace-filled place. Even though there is death and sin it, we have a Jesus who died for it. He was so thoroughly enfolded by the Father's love that he could give his own life to that flow.

We only do what we see our fathers do.

"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes [my Father]...has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." (John 5:24)

Thank God for His strong love that flowed through Wesley Addison Smith. May we take ahold of that strength also, that fortress of faith, that receiving of God, and so also cross from death to life.

In the Name of the Father, and of His Son, and of their Holy Spirit of love,  
Amen.