

“ I Love You, Isa”
A Father’s Day Message by Matt Riivald, June 19, 2005

Good morning!! Somehow I have managed to convince our pastors that I should be the one to give today’s message. You’ll notice that both Pastor Gary and Pastor Dave seem to be sitting there calm as can be; however, two weeks ago, when I asked Pastor Gary if he would be back from vacation for Father’s Day, he gave me a clue as to his real state of mind when he said he would be “Taking notes.” Oh, boy!!

During the mid to late 1930’s my father was a very popular operatic tenor in Estonia, a little country in Northern Europe, just south of Finland. You see, God blessed my father with a beautiful, ringing voice so strong that in 1934, at the “tender” age 19, he was chosen to be the lead tenor soloist in Estonia’s National Opera Company. Starting in 1940, after arriving in Europe with my mother, a professional pianist, he continued his singing career and sang for the royal families of several European countries and appeared in many operas and concerts.

1950 marked our family’s arrival in America. My father and mother once again began performing and he appeared with many major orchestras such as the Boston Pops and the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra. But due to circumstances beyond his control he never was able to fulfill his dream of singing opera professionally in America and that contributed to his growing frustrations as an artist, a husband and a father.

He was an enigma, a puzzle, a riddle to me for many, many years. 23 years after leaving home for California I finally decided that I would have that father-and-son talk. Since Maret and I were already raising a family, I was not going to do “the birds and the bees” thing. However, there were many things that I hoped to clear up between us at our July 1986 reunion.

First I wanted to say, “Ma armastan sind, Isa.” That’s Estonian for “I love you, Dad.” I had never told him that. I yearned to know more about his childhood, his brothers and sisters and friends, because few of them survived WWII and I never got to meet any of them. At the reunion, I hoped he would entertain us with tales of comedic mishaps on the operatic stage because when I was a kid, I heard him tell some really funny stories about that. And I had always wondered how he felt about me.

It was May of 1986, just before Mother’s Day, that he died. Everything – everything I had wanted to say and know for so many years was left unsaid, unasked and unanswered. And it was because I had procrastinated.

By the time I left home in 1963, there was little or no communication between us. We spoke now and again, but you have to understand, he came from the “old” school – children were to be seen and not heard. So, unless I had something really important to say, he wasn’t there for me and I was too shy to push it. Really – I was. In the mid 1950’s as I was growing up, he worked 16 to 20 hours a day. He’d come home from work dead tired, grab a bite to eat, watch the 11:00 o’clock news and go to bed so he could do it again early the next morning. And on weekends he was off singing somewhere.

My dad was a fairly strict disciplinarian – with a quick temper. Combine those two and sometimes that led to a trip to the proverbial woodshed for – ah – how shall I say it, an “instructional” session that left a real impression on my – well, you know where. However, being properly disciplined by him did not diminish my self-esteem, my ability to achieve, did not turn me into a surly grump or any other kind of antisocial miscreant.

Using the same basic disciplinary methods my father used, but softened with an explanation and a hug afterwards, Markus and Adam grew up to be strong, young men who are prospering and leading healthy, law abiding lives.

Proverbs 3 Verses 11 and 12 are right on point. “...Do not reject the discipline of the Lord or loathe his reproof, for whom the Lord loves, he reproofs, as the father a son in whom he delights...”

We as parents do the same thing. We discipline a child in whom we delight. If we didn't care, we wouldn't bother.

In 1986 I lost an irreplaceable opportunity *forever* because of my procrastination. Psalm 128 teaches, if we have reverence and trust for the Lord, our heavenly Father will reward us with gifts of prosperity and happiness, and I believe he will lead us to do things in a *timely fashion*. I don't believe he tolerates procrastination. I think it's fair to say most of us here revere and trust in the Lord. But do we maintain that level of faithfulness as good and faithful servants of our heavenly Father on a daily basis? I know that I fall way short of that goal.

When the Lord took Maret home and brought Paula to me, someone I never dreamed of looking for, much less finding, my cup truly began to run over. I don't know what I did to deserve these gifts, but James 5:17 says every good and perfect gift comes from the Father. I say Amen to that.

We know God teaches that men and women are supremely equal, *but* their roles are drastically and meaningfully different. I'm sure each of us has experienced another difference between men and women and that is how differently they *perceive* things.

Late one evening a wife found her husband standing over their baby's crib. Silently she watched him. As her husband stood looking down at the sleeping infant, she saw on his face a mixture of emotions: disbelief, doubt, delight, amazement, enchantment and, yes, skepticism. Touched by this unusual display and the deep emotions it aroused, with eyes glistening she slipped her arm around her husband and said, "A penny for your thoughts."

"It's amazing!" he replied. "I just can't see how anybody can make a crib like that for only \$46.50." I'm guessing Pastor Gary would agree with that in a heartbeat.

Now, being a dad can be fun. Markus and I once jumped out of a perfectly good airplane – at 12,500 feet. Oh, yeah. With parachutes. Being a dad can also be difficult, especially in times of grief. 2-1/2 years ago they lost their mother, and just 13 months ago it was Grandma. For the second time in a year and a half I had to call Adam to have him ask for bereavement leave from his military duties for yet another funeral service.

Paul says, regardless of the hardships, one should always be a loving dad. And if you don't use the action form of the word to show how you care, you're not following the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus was the best example, the quintessential example of showing love through action.

In Ephesians 5:28 through 6:4 we learn how family members should behave toward one another. Today, we too often fall short of *showing* our parents, our wives and children that we love them. Oh, we can *give* things, but it's far more effective to *DO* things. For instance, instead of having your sweetheart give you a "honey do" chore, something you really would rather not do, get on it first. Do the little things -- like saying "I love you" with a hug and a kiss -- "just because." Do the same for your children. Really be there for them. Tell them you love them. I know it's easy to tell my sons I love them and give them a hug because that's what I do. Best of all, they reciprocate. It doesn't get any better than that.

Sadly, I never said, "Ma armastan sind, Isa." The closest I ever came to saying, "I love you, Dad," was one New Year's Eve, many years ago when I had partied too hard and thought I'd worked up enough courage – from a bottle – to give him a call in the Virgin Islands, to where he had retired. But I chickened out. I didn't do it. Bummer.

Now, something wonderful has happened during the process of preparing today's message, I have discovered a new way to say "I love you" to my dad. You see, today's message has turned out to be a letter from me to my dad as well as my Heavenly Father.

I'm content with having written – and today saying – the words, "I love you, Dad," knowing our Lord has passed them on to my father. It's all I can ask – and it is enough.

If you've lost a parent and things were left unsaid, you, too, can fix it by writing a letter. The Good Lord will see to it that your letter, the very spirit of your letter, gets to where it needs to be.

You see, God will be looking for it and he'll forward your letter. Just the act of writing that letter can eventually release you from your torment.

And if you have something on your heart you need to clear up with your father or your mother, do *it* today. Remember, procrastination can exact a very high price. It can fill you with everlasting regret, as I thought it did me – until I started preparing this message.

1st John, Chapter 4, verse 18 says there is no fear in love. Don't let your uncertainty about how your efforts will be received by your parent create fear in your heart. Let the power of God's love guide you through the steps you need to take to heal your troubled soul. Do this and you may well fill that big hole in your heart.

I'm delighted to say some members of our congregation agreed to put a few thoughts down about their dads for me to read here today. I had to edit these submissions a little – well, okay – some more than others, but after the service, Dads, we will present you with the originals – to be filed with your important family heirloom documents.

First Service Readings

1. Looking back, I can best describe my father through a timeline of a love/hate relationship, but in the end discovering what the true meaning of a father is. From the ages of 3 through 7 he was the strongest, can-do-anything, be anything, smartest father in the world. By age 8 it seemed he didn't know exactly everything. From age 9 to 10 he didn't always agree with everything I said and did, saying things sure were different in the "olden days," and by the time I reached 11, I sometimes wished I had another dad. Between ages 12 and 13, I felt there was no point in paying attention to him. Through the ages of 14 to 18 I learned the value of money, staying in school, that driving was a privilege and not a right. 19 brought the belief there was no sense in listening to my dad. I had better things to do. Now, at 23, I'm glad he's always been there for me. Dad, please believe me when I say that I truly cherish you and Mom. And make note that I would be lost without you. I know I don't say it often, but thank you for all that you do for me and our family. I love you and may your Father's Day be filled with lots of joy. Todd

2. How does a son begin to explore the definition of his own father? He does it by recognizing the things that make a father unique are the things you see in his child. My father taught me to be proud of who I am, to not be ashamed of being wrong but always doing the right thing. My father once forced his two young children to sit through 2001: A Space Odyssey, and then was baffled by the questions and curiosity brought forth by a movie that was supposed to put us to sleep. My father and I have very little in common and at the same time we have everything in common. We can talk for hours about anything and everything, and he is always there for a good laugh or small bit of advice. The one thing that I am most proud about my father is that I now know what to do to try and be as great a father as he is. Michael

3. My dad is [exceptionally] smart, and knows everything or at least something about everything. Now the good thing is he passed it on to me. If anything, I am proud of the fact that my dad has equipped me with the knowledge of how to handle life and all its problems. That also goes for the book stuff he showed me on how to figure something out if I do not know it. With lots of love and thanks, Dad, Richard.

4. When I was a child I thought my dad was incredible. He was always there for me. We would wrestle, do chores, play, learn new things. I remember family walks and trying to keep his pace, two of my quick strides to his one slow stride. I wanted to be just like my dad. As a teenager, I watched my dad go through some really hard times in life. I learned that no matter

the pain, it wasn't in our hands to settle, but to love the source of the pain. I watched my dad work harder than ever and learned what it meant to be committed to your dream, your family and God. Dad studied late into the nights and awoke early to meet with God and I learned steadfastness. I learned the value of family, hard work, commitment and passion. Whenever I needed my dad, he'd be there. I can remember telling him to stop driving home from seminary to watch me cheer at basketball games; just stay there and study," I'd say, to which he always replied, "What if you do something new tonight and I miss it? I don't want to miss you." My dad has taught me more by his actions than he will ever know. I might be biased, but my dad is Mr. Incredible. He truly walks his talk. Thank you, Dad! Happy Father's Day! Jodi

Second Service Readings

1. My dad is always there for me no matter what. In life, school and daily situations he is always there to help me in any circumstance. He always puts God and his family first. He is an amazing provider. He has incredible love for God, family, friends and others. He never quits and he always works to the best of his ability. I hope someday I will have the same wonderful qualities that he has. I am so blessed and honored to have a Dad like this!

Olivia Honda

2. To the average teenager, a father is more of a burden, if anything. Maybe not so much as a mom, but he has his part. He's the guy that's always *not* up to speed with the current trends in music and pop culture. And he's also the guy that has to be the one to tell his son why girls are so unpredictable. The father is the leader, the provider, the discipliner (and how). However, to the Christian teenager, a father is more than that. Of course, a father has those same qualities, but it goes much deeper than that. He is the witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. It's the dad's duty to pass his wisdom and his knowledge of God on to his own child. And it's the father's duty to make sure those words and wisdom stay instilled within the child (or else). Father's Day is more than going out to dinner to honor a special individual; it's a time to honor the one who really showed the child the way to the Almighty. And that's what really matters.

Solomon Encina

3. Dear Dad. You are the best daddy in the world because you make up funny nicknames for me. And you make really good food. Thank you for taking us to Legg Lake and thank you for buying all those Shirley Temple movies. Thank you for taking good care of me and Taba.

Happy Father's Day,
Love,
Sammydoodle

Would the writers of these heartfelt words stand and introduce their dads?
Thank you, all. Please be seated.

I'm going to close with a little prayer. Dear Father in Heaven, I thank you for the goodness you have shown me and all of us. I thank you for your love, your Grace, your sacrifice through your son, Jesus Christ. Most of all, I want to say, "I love you, Dad. I love you, my Heavenly Father."

Folks, know that your Father in Heaven loves you. Go and share that love.

Amen