THE PERFECT TIE

“I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” --Matthew 12:7

Today is Father’s Day. Last week I challenged you that we better have as many people come on father’s day than we did on mother’s day so that Dad’s won’t feel neglected... Although to be honest, father’s day isn’t as big as mother’s day. Have you heard the one where they ask a young kid what is Father’s Day? "It's just like Mother’s Day,” he says, “only you don't spend as much." Actually, this joke is true. In the US, the average amount spent on gifts for dad is $135, where we spend an average of $186 on Mother’s Day gifts; 33% more. But I don't think the bigger gifts are because we love mom more than dad. I think the reason we spend less on dad is because it is very hard to get dads something they need or want, and even harder to get something that expresses how grateful we are. After all, our dads have sacrificed to provide us everything, what gift adequately expresses thanks for that? I think that’s why I tend to throw my hands up and just get my Dad another card or another tie.

Well this isn’t just a problem for father’s day once a year, this is also a problem for our heavenly father’s day, which is every Sunday. Sunday is the Lord’s day, the ultimate father’s day, and the whole point of us coming to worship is that we are supposed to be giving something to our heavenly father, in gratitude for all we receive. So what do we give our heavenly father? What gift could possible give thanks for He who provides literally everything. What gift to give for He who has literally everything.

Now our playful question has turned into a very significant theological one that people have asked for thousands of years. What gifts can we possibly provide to our heavenly father, maker of heavens and earth? How to express our gratitude that we are alive, we are fed, we have the joys of friendship and family, we receive comfort and satisfaction by the work of our hands. What gifts can we give to God to show our gratitude?

Well we can build a beautiful church to praise him. Check! We offer our beautiful voices and sweet smelling incense which rises to God in praise. Check! We offer up sacrifices (gifts) to Him of our time and money. Check! And we are right to offer up all these things to our heavenly father here at St. Hagop every Sunday in worship. But does God really need these things? I expect God likes them, but I think we need them more than Him. To find out what God the Father most deeply desires from us, we go to our chosen scripture reading and find his request of us; short, sweet and to the point... “I desire mercy not sacrifice.”

That’s all he wants, God himself said it, repeated it and lived it. But this gift can’t be bought, it's not easily found and hard to give. $50 in the collection plate is a nice gift; $50 in the collection plate and vowing each week to become a humble, forgiving and grateful servant of God, that’s the perfect gift. But the perfect gift is hard to come by, so most of the time, we settle with getting God the Father another tie. Look God, I helped build this church for you. I enforce church tradition for you. I dedicate a lot of time to you. These are fine things, but in the end-just things-and God needs nothing. “I desire mercy not sacrifice.” Ultimately, God will settle for nothing less than ourselves, nothing less than a merciful heart that loves God and others more than any other thing.

God the father desires the gift of our selves, just as our fathers and families desire the gift of spending time together more than any other. But God also desires our selves because being with God is the only way we will come to act like Him. Daily spending time in intimate prayer, reflection and silence with the God of love and mercy, is the main way that we will become people of love and mercy, and this is the work of a lifetime.

And so today on the day we celebrate Fathers, let us remember how much our fathers have done for us-most especially our heavenly Father- and offer up suitable gifts of thanks. Yes, let’s give gifts to God and his church, these are fitting and appropriate. But let us also not forget to give the only gift which God has asked for; “I desire mercy not sacrifice.” For it seems that our Father in heaven is no lover of things, or savior of ties, but a lover of souls, and savior of people...and it pleases him most to transform each one of us into the same; now and always, amen.