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SERMON TITLE: Everlasting Father: *The Life & Times of Jeremiah*

SCRIPTURE: Jeremiah 31:31-37

DATE: December 22, 2019

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## *Advent Four*

Jeremiah stands between the people and God speaking to each for the other. In this case, he reminds the people about a God who has created the cosmos yet who takes the character of Father.

God may not be like the father you have experienced.

Let's see. In this passage Jeremiah articulates God as:

- taking them by the hand
- leading them out of bondage
- loving them as a husband loves his wife
- putting the knowledge of God in their hearts
- helping them understand God
- willingly assumes the role of their God
- willingly allows himself to be known
- forgives their wickedness
- NEVER remembers their sins
- Will not reject his people

This may not be like a father you have known.

Isaiah calls him "Everlasting Father." Thus our bulletin.

Think about what this means. Everlasting—a father who has brought up children only to watch them run away. But he never gives up. Think about the prodigal son. He ran away in hostility after his father gave him all his share of inheritance. The father waited. Finally the young man returned, broken and sin-filled causing him to lose everything. What did the father do?

Embraced him. Led him out of bondage back into the family fold. Loving him with open arms; forgiving his wickedness; forgetting his sins, he throws him a party.

He is an Everlasting Father.

He has no limits. He created the cosmos. And yet he embraces the sinful son who returns to him.

This may not be like the father you have known.

Perhaps you have had an absent father; one who abandoned his responsibilities.

A Jewish woman recently asked her Christian friend about God. She did not believe in God most of the time. She asked her Christian friend, "Does God only love those who believe in him?" She answered "No, God loves you regardless of whether you love him because God is love." The unbeliever responded. "Then I love him."

Scripture confirms this. John writes, "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19).

This may not be like the father you have known. God does not pattern himself after humans. But, if you are a father, this is a worthy pattern for you to take to heart.

Let's look at some fathers. In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* there are two warring fathers. They are bitter enemies. Their hatred of each other spreads to hatred of the entire family of each other.

All Montagues hate all Capulets. All Capulets hate all Montagues. Children, cousins, nieces and nephews, even friends, and servants associated with the other side is the enemy. To encounter one of the enemy is to incite instant rage.

They take pride in their hatred of the other.

The play begins with these words:

*"In the beautiful city of Verona, where our story takes place, a long-standing hatred between two families erupts into new violence, and citizens stain their hands with the blood of their fellow citizens."*<sup>1</sup>

You know the basic story of these two families, good prominent families, well-respected, as Shakespeare describes them, "both alike in dignity." But they are marred because they cannot overcome the ill feelings; the "ancient grudge" that they have for one another. So that's how it stands in Verona.

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<sup>1</sup> Beginning of William Shakespeare's prologue in its original poetic language:

**Romeo and Juliet, Act 1, Prologue**

Two households, both alike in dignity,  
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,  
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,  
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.  
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes  
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;  
Whose misadventured piteous overthrows  
Do with their death bury their parents' strife.

One night Romeo and some friends and relatives crash a party of the Capulets. They are “maskers,” masked partygoers, who perform a dance, their identity unknown. Romeo notices Juliet, whose father is trying to marry off to Count Paris, a kinsman to the prince. Juliet has no desire for marriage, except to reject it!

Romeo falls instantly in love.

Juliet’s cousin, Tybalt, figures out who the maskers are. Romeo is a Montague! So Tybalt wants to kill him.

Hatred, unaddressed, infects the rest of your family.

Well, Romeo is so utterly smitten, that he leaps walls and climbs trellises to get near Juliet. He stays longer than he should. You know the story—the balcony scene, the secret marriage, the nurse and the friar who help this young couple. No one else knows.

But Tybalt’s rage against Romeo brews, and he challenges him to a duel. Romeo, now part of the family, even though no one knows, refuses to duel Tybalt. His friend, Mercutio, takes the challenge to defend Romeo’s honor, however, in the duel he is mortally wounded. Romeo steps in to defend Mercutio, and accidentally kills Tybalt. It will mean the death will be avenged. He flees. But the prince desires to stop the killing so instead he banishes Romeo.

Meanwhile, Juliet’s father is more determined to marry her off by that Thursday. What will Juliet do? Now the dilemma really begins. She refuses. Her father threatens to disown this insulate child and throw her, his only child, out of the house.

When hatred brews in a family, it begins a thread of anger which overshadows even the care for their own children. This man’s heart was cold.

So Juliet left home in crisis, and concocted a scheme which went awry and, in the words of Shakespeare, “A pair of star-cross’d lovers take their life.”

I do not know what your family’s experience is—but here’s what God is like. Here’s God’s idea of family.

Here is God’s way:

“I take my people by the hand and leading them out of bondage, I love them as a husband loves his wife. Even though they broke that covenant I am making a new covenant. In that covenant I forgive their unfaithful betrayal and I never look back and remember their sins. Instead, I open their hearts by forgiveness and put in their hearts the knowledge of God, helping them to understand God.”

As if that were not enough, God does not stop there. God explains God’s position: God is in charge of all the elements of

this created world. God every day keeps the sun in place to light the day and the moon and stars in their orbit to light the night. These are the laws of nature. That stable foundation will not end except in God’s sovereign will at the right time.

In addition, God is in charge of the elements of chaos in this world—the roaring of the sea: its rising and diminishing, its storms, its unpredictabilities which no human person, God says, can measure or understand. This is God’s terrain and God is in charge. “His name is the LORD of Heaven’s Armies, and this is what he says.” (Jer 31:35)

God adds,

*“I am as likely to reject my people Israel as I am to abolish the laws of nature!” (v. 36) and “so I will not consider casting my people away for the evil they have done.” (v. 37)*

I do not know your experience with your earthly father. But God, your Heavenly Father, loves you and has absolutely no anger or resentment toward you at all. His Son, is just like him, because the Father’s love, forgiveness, and commitment has permeated God’s immediately family—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and extends to you.

I don’t know your family’s experience, but would you be willing to embrace God’s family’s way? For it is your Everlasting family, your Everlasting Father.

AMEN