

JUNE 28, 2026

# Marion weekly update

## FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

*SERMON "Father's Day" Matthew 7:9-12*

This week we celebrate Father's Day. The passage this morning is very much about God the Good Father. While much in scripture often applies across the board of all of us, today we're going to honor the day and use the direct language of "father" as the scripture uses.

I also remind us that "father" is a role. Every man in some way shape of form is called to embody this. No matter where we are there are people who need a parental, guiding hand. It doesn't matter if we're related by family. We are all connected by Spirit. In that we men are responsible to demonstrate what a good, fatherly example looks like. More importantly we are responsible to embody what a good and Godly man and father figure looks like.

Here we have an acknowledgment from God that I think is incredibly complimentary and encouraging. The language is a little harsh, and yet even in that we find hope. The context is that of making requests. We pray asking God to help us in our time of need. Jesus uses father as the illustration.

He says that "even you who are evil know how to give good gifts". The idea is that if one of our kids asks us as fathers for help, we have the ability to have enough sense to know what is a good response. We know the good thing to help the circumstance.

So here's the two things.

First, Jesus acknowledges that we are, as He puts it, "evil". In other words we are imperfect. We are faulty. We make mistakes and we sin. God sees us in our mistakes and our bad judgment. Yet this isn't some condemning statement. To the contrary it's affirming.

Even in our mistakes God sees our promise. Mistakes aren't the last word. There isn't a father alive or has ever been that doesn't look back on decisions, reactions, and so forth without regret. There isn't one of us that hasn't said "I wish I'd done that differently", or "I could have handled that better", or "I hope that didn't mess up too bad to be fixed." Here we are reminded that even in that reality we still have the ability to do good.

Jesus still forgives. Grace still abounds and abides. We know we have forgiveness from Jesus. If you're like me you just pray that forgiveness comes from the ones affected by our mistakes.

Hopefully for all of us as we age and mature the mistakes get fewer between.

We don't need to fear God. We do need to keep doing our best to do better.

And that's the second great encouragement! We know what the "good thing" looks like! We can tell good from bad and right from wrong. Thank goodness! The ability to have good judgment is within us.

To Jesus' point, if even we imperfect fathers can tell what is a good answer to a request from our children, how much more does the perfect Father know?

This is a place where scripture corrects a faulty sensibility we often hear. It's the idea that everything that happens is in God's plan and will. The excuse is when things that are bad happen they aren't actually "bad". We just can't see the good because we're not God. Yet Jesus tells us that this sense of good and bad is so evident that even imperfect people know the difference.

An initial note is that to say everything is "part of God's plan" is to deny that we have free will. That sense declares that everything is prewritten and decided and we're just acting out the script on a stage. It declares that God actually makes us sin. It declares that God descends terminal illness on children and horrific life circumstances on every age and nation.

To hold to this is to look at the victims of 9/11 and tell them "no, that was actually a good thing, you just don't know why." To the parent whose child was tragically taken in an accident that their death is "actually a good thing." To the person praying for healing that the years of pain and torture and burden are "actually a good thing". To say to the Jewish survivor or their family that the Holocaust was "actually a good thing". We just can't see the good.

Good luck with uttering that face to face with those kinds of circumstances.

The examples Jesus gives aren't ambiguous or vague. They don't account for horrors in the place of a good result. In fact it does the opposite. If you're asked for bread will you hand them a rock? Of course not! For a fish and give them a snake? Of course not!

If I ask you to give me safe travel will you kill my family in a car crash and hospitalize me for months? If I ask you to heal my disease will you say "nah, I think I'm going to make it a hundred times worse and end your life causing incredible pain and hardship for you and your family"?

Of course not! These don't line up at all with reason, logic, and certainly not with this scripture!

At the end of the day we have some harsh realities to deal with. People, including us, make bad choices that sometimes have horrible impacts. Our world has a brokenness that affects our bodies in the form of disease and disability. The weather isn't happening because "God aims it". If that were the case we couldn't forecast and predict it. It would be wildly random. Yet natural disasters occur and people are in the way when they do. We know that the world right now isn't the way it started. Genesis reminds us that it was all good. That was God's perfect plan. It quickly got upended. Since creation things have twisted and turned. Good and bad happen sometimes without rhyme or reason.

To accuse God of dropping all the issues in our lives into our lap and cruelly trying to make us figure out how it's "good" when even Jesus says that we imperfect fathers have enough sense to know pretty directly the difference between a good and bad response to a request. That doesn't make sense.

Now you may say "well I've seen good things come out of bad circumstances". Absolutely! And THAT is the good gift.

We have the bad thing happen. For whatever reason. Rather than blame the Father for it we go to the Father and ask how to handle it. How do we move forward? How do we stay faithful? How do we grow? We look for reserves of strength and patience that are beyond comprehension. We ask for a hand to hold us one step at a time moving into the next thing, whatever it is. We come to the people of God and lean on one another and let God speak through our love, compassion, and support.

We trust that if we go to the Father in prayer we won't get some ugly scolding or otherwise. We'll get a "well, here we are however we got here. Let's take the next best step to move forward." That's how forgiveness works and often natural consequences are far greater than anything that could be imposed.

We could unpack this all day long, but we won't. At the end of the day in my opinion there's a lot of stuff through scripture that makes us scratch our head. In the end for me if Jesus is THE most ideal expression of God in the world He is where I'm going to start as I try to sort those squirrely things out.

Here we have a wonderful reality given to us. The things that we have happen to us or that we witness and we see them as bad. We are allowed. We don't have to do gymnastics to make it fit into some kind of "well it HAS to be good SOMEHOW" box. God isn't gaslighting us.

What God is doing is walking with us in the midst of all the need, all the hurt, all the good and all the bad. The reality of choice and a world that exists with all its issues is that things will happen that aren't part of God's perfect plan or in God's will. Thanks goodness that God is that perfect Father who won't abandon us even in a mess.

God is the Father who forgives and offers another chance, another step, another opportunity and guidance along with it to get past whatever happens. The good gifts we look for are often physical. This physical world has its perks but it can also be brutal. The good gifts are typically spiritual in nature helping us get through an imperfect world. The question on our end is whether we are willing to accept the lessons and the help.

We trust that the statement "the last thing is never the worst thing" is a true statement. Even if the bad things ends our time in this life, we have the hope that what comes next is an eternal gift in God's kingdom. This is a view that truly helps us to see end of life when a loved one is in pain and tragic illness as a gift and a freedom. This Father's day I hope we are thankful for that perfect Father who created a good and perfect world. That Father still holds with us even when we make choices that spoil that perfection. And those good gifts help us do better and deal better day by day. I hope we are thankful for the fathers in our lives who have done their honest best to walk with us as we have grown and lived. Who have, despite being imperfect, still somehow managed to embody the Father to us.

Then moment to moment, day to day strive to know and exercise that good judgement Jesus says we are capable of. It is both following God and demonstrating God's goodness all at the same time.

**Pastor Brent's weekly note:**

**Church,**

**This week is a “week between”. We celebrated Father's Day last week and next we celebrate Independence Day. They have in common that both are about relationships.**

**A strong father is strong because of the relationships forged in his family, with his community, and with God. Ironically and independent nation is strong because the relationships of its citizens are powerful, healthy, and willing to set aside self for the greater good of the whole.**

**This summer, take time to keep deepening and forging relationships. They are the backbone of every unit of our lives from the slightest friendship to the most global connections of nations.**

**It is easy to step back and forget that relationships need tending constantly to stay healthy and strong. Summer tempts us away with the relaxation, wonderful weather, vacations and so on. We can enjoy both.**

**Stay steady on connecting with family, friends, neighbors, and most importantly, not just for today but for the eternal tomorrow, with God and your Marion community of faith that is the body of Christ.**

**-Brent**