

PASTORAL PRAYER

Gracious God, you love us like a dear father; nurture us like a caring mother, and we are your children. In your example, we celebrate the example of fathers who love and sacrifice with diligence and care for their children and for all under their charge. On this day, we also recognize brokenness. We remember those who knew no father, those who are separated from their fathers through conflict, death, or distance, those who do not know the example of a loving father. May our celebrations honor all, those who celebrate the day and those who find the day one that opens old wounds. You, God, honor us all; may we carry out your example, both in this day and beyond. We lift all that we are to you and ask that you hear each of our prayers, those audible and those within our hearts.

On this Trinity Sunday, we honor who you are, God, in all three persons and many ways you interact with us. We do not fully understand this mystery of the Trinity, but we know that you, God, are diverse and holy in your very nature. We respect that you, by your nature as three persons in one, show us how we should be. We celebrate that as you made us in your image, we are called to live as you live: in loving relationship, caring for each other as we would ourselves. For this holy calling that you yourself model, we hope to be worthy and partake in everyday. We pray all these things in your name, God, as we honor Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer in the prayer that Christ taught us, saying together...

SERMON

Today is a special day in which we honor fathers in all their forms: adoptive fathers, genetic fathers, grandfathers, great grandfathers, examples of fatherhood we've taken with us. All of these are worth our celebrations. If you think about it, the ones what we most admire, the ones we most remember are the ones that connected especially with us. I no

longer have a grandfather on earth, but I remember my mother's father, who was with us until I was ten years old. I have great memories of the way that he connected with me and tried to be a good example. My Grandpa Warner had an unforgettable big red truck. I can't remember how old I was, but one day we were driving along in that red truck. My vivid imagination told me that we were driving along in a fire truck. Well, for some reason I had two toy fireman helmets with me, so I donned one and asked Grandpa to wear one as well. He took it up and became a firefighter with me (without breaking the speed limit, of course). To a young child with those aspirations of being a firefighter in that moment, his small action made all the difference. It showed he wanted to connect with me and wanted to prove to me that what mattered to me mattered to him. He wanted to show how much his relationship with me meant to him. I still remember that small action and how he wanted to be in loving relationship with me as his grandchild, especially on this Father's Day. Indeed, loving relationship is probably the best gift we can ever give and the best gift we can ever receive, for fathers and for Christians, for it lasts longer than we know.

Right alongside Father's day, on the liturgical calendar, is Trinity Sunday, the honoring of the tripartite God, three persons, one God. These two separate but conjoined holidays today come together in a unique way in our scripture lesson. We recognize one of the most important stories to us as people of faith: the story of creation. It emphasizes God's infinite creating power, God's all-powerful nature. This story, at the same time, reveals God's caring heart, that like compassionate father. This not only unlocks a lot about our God, it tells us a lot about how we should live. As creatures created mindfully and lovingly in the Image of God, we see who we are meant to be as God's creatures. That fact not only demonstrates how a faithful father should live but also a faithful mother and any

faithful child of God. Let us look with new eyes at this story of Creation, see what the Image of God really means, and how that fits everything in this story and these holidays together.

The creation story is one of the most beloved stories in all of Christendom, but, like so many other scriptures, it has a hidden layer that we cannot see with our English translation. We hear the telling of a formless void, the resounding “Let there be light,” and so many powerful statements that provoke our imagination, but there is more here. What we read as an English Narrative, a seemingly systematic telling of events, is not what’s going on underneath the surface. When we read the account of creation in its original Hebrew, we get a different feeling than a straightforward narrative. It’s not this happened, then this happened in the Hebrew; we actually hear a poem. Put simply, the original intent of this story was to be poetic, to even be a song, with every day of creation a verse of this song, according to the Texts for Preaching Commentary. It’s meant to be a beautiful telling of God’s incredible creative acts, but poetry does not necessarily translate when we move from one language to another. When you look at the Psalms, we know them to be poetic songs from the start, but they don’t necessarily read that way to our eyes and ears when we read them in English. We read the story from Genesis to be a factual, straight-out account, but it has more to it; it’s poetry, intending to give a beautiful, heartfelt tribute to God’s miraculous acts of creation. Creation is art, and the way this story was written lends itself to that fact. Even when you read it in English, looking at the story as poetry, you see the repetition at the beginning of each day: “And God said.” You begin see the way that each day presents new ideas but with the same beat. It’s formulaic, saying the same thing over and over, because that’s the way the Hebrew poetry works.

A lot is important in this story, but there's one piece that has challenged and awed us for centuries. "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." It's poetic like the rest of this creation story, but this line contains something very, very integral: we were created in the image of God. Now, we know this is significant, but what does this really mean? Scholars have debated it for centuries. It's very easy to throw around different interpretations of "image of God," hoping to get something that ultimately fits. We can take it to the literal affect that we look like God. Yet, that's too simple and doesn't mean a lot for how we live our daily lives. A good interpretation to carry with us has to have more meat, more substance to it. I find the most profound interpretation of the Image of God from one of my professors in seminary, Dr. Larry Graham, who said that to be created in the Image of God means that we are created to be in relationship with one another.

Out of all the interpretations I've ever heard, this not only has the most weight to it, it is the most meaningful for how we live our daily lives in light of the scripture. We were created for relationship because that is at the heart of God. Three persons in one essence, working together and loving one another. Just as it is very nature of God, we are created to love and be loved. We are created to connect with our God and each other as our God connects with us and within the Trinity. I find this so insightful because it brings together everything we are talking about today and the holidays we honor. We can talk about what the Trinity looks like and the theological implications along the way, but at the root of it all is this: God IS the very definition of relationship with the Trinity. Three persons united together in purpose, essence, and sense of love. Put very simply, our mission is to be in relationship: with each other, with God, with ourselves, because God is the very definition

of relationship. On this day, we honor fathers who have done this as well. We honor the fathers of every form who have done their darndest at every point to be good examples, who have invested in their families and children, who have loved with their whole hearts in word and deed. This is faithful relationship for fathers and example for all of us to carry on.

I'm recognizing how I put all of these things together with my life and my story. If there's one thing that I've learned from my father, it is the importance of hard work and connecting with others. These are some of his greatest gifts to offer the world. No matter where he is or what he is doing, he takes the time to chat or go out and eat together. He is quite the extrovert, so it comes naturally to him. As I grew up, he consistently challenged me to also be someone who connects with others. It was not an easy journey. I don't have the same gifts as him, so I couldn't just duplicate his style. I had to recognize my own strengths. I just can't go up to strangers and start a random conversation; it feels more than weird to me. Nevertheless, over time, I have started to develop my own style in how I best connect with others. I value the lessons he taught me about the importance of relationship. Not only does this have obvious connections to daily life, it has deep connections in the heart of our Christian theology and faith.

Whether you are a father, a child, a mother, or anything in between, we have a calling to invest in good and faithful relationship. Unfortunately, in this day in age, we lose the heart of the concept of "relationship." It's cheap. We easily take it at either end of two extremes: either deeply intimate romantic relationship or the equivalent of passing someone and saying a quick "hi." I've also heard the equivalent of "relationship" being that we do not actively hate one another. None of these tell the whole story. Relationship to one another in light of the Trinity is a much different matter. The implications are great

and many. We're afraid of it because it means that we give just as much as we take. It means that we don't be anonymous but that we care for those that may not care about us. It means that we have to take the hard route with one another. It means that we have to take on conflict head-on and don't let it simmer in the background. It means loving honesty with each other and mutual accountability. It means encountering one another when we feel we have been wronged and having the courage to say we are sorry when we have wronged. It's not easy; it's not about my wants but making sure that we all are taken care of. Relationship is a life-long process but important beyond anything else in this world. The heart of the First Commandment, love the Lord your God, is relationship with our God, and the Second Commandment, to love your neighbor as yourself, is relationship with one another and good relationship with yourself. The focal point of everything we do is this simple but complicated thing, and I find it is integral, graceful, and challenging.

This Father's Day and Trinity Sunday, take time to remember that the heart of it all, why fathers matter, why we value the Trinity, why we are even in this building, is loving relationship. I think there is nothing, nothing greater in the Christian life. We understand and are best able to love one another not from a distance, not with anger in our hearts, but when we come alongside one another and invest in the benefit of one another. It is how a good father helps raise a child. It is what makes the Trinity what it is. It is what makes the church healthy and loving to all in these walls and to our ministry outside these walls. It is what undergirds our very nature as human beings, created in the Image of God, in the image of the God that lives every day in relationship with each member. When we overlook that integral component of life, the Trinity loses its power in our lives and the church has no power for transformation. Let's make that not so. Thanks be to God! Amen and Amen.