

Sunday 18th June 2023; Trinity 2. Father's Day. Benefice Holy Communion Gilling and Sung Evensong, Stonegrave

Continuing our theme from Trinity Sunday last Sunday concerning families, today we give thanks for and remember fathers. Perhaps it is an opportunity to remember your own father or reflect also what a joy it is to be a father... most of the time!

Although Father's Day is not specifically part of the Christian season, as Mother's Day is, it does challenge us to think about what it means to us to speak of God as Father. The word, 'Father' is, like all the language we used about God, a metaphor, and metaphors can both illuminate and distort. Much will depend on our individual experience of being fathered, and whether that was intimate and affirming, distant and judgemental or even, in some tragic cases, abusive or absent. For many, the metaphor will also be coloured by our experience of fathering, of the joys and sorrows, the commitment and vulnerability that parenthood involves.

In the New Testament, Jesus frequently refers to God as "my father", and uniquely and as never before by anyone else, addresses God directly as "Abba" (Daddy) and teaches his disciples a prayer which begins with the words "Our Father". It is therefore through Jesus' life, death and resurrection that we are able to know and experience God as our Father.

In his Epistle to the Romans St Paul writes about the way in which Jesus enables us to experience the fatherhood of God, especially in two words he uses - 'grace' and 'life.'

By grace, Paul means the freely given love and generosity of God the Father, a love and generosity made visible in Jesus, a love and generosity which we can experience in many ways that is transformative, not least as forgiveness for our human errors and shortcomings. By justifying us in this way, in Christ, God made peace with us forever. We also stand in God's grace by our faith.

When Paul writes of the life that Jesus lives as being “lived to God” he is reminding his readers that this is a life of relationship with God, that is open to us; a family life into which all are able to enter. The implications of that life are profoundly challenging, and we are given hope to inspire and motivate us in that challenge.

Is this hope risky? Paul says it is not. Why? Because, he says, God has poured his love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit to assure us. If then the God of the universe loves us, we can be confident that He is worth trusting. Paul says God has proved that love to us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. God did not wait for us to get stronger or better, He acted first to resolve the dispute between us. He sent Christ to die at exactly the right time to save us.

A standing in the gift of grace reassures us; God’s attitude towards you and I as believers in Christ Jesus is one of favour, seeing each of us in terms of joy, beauty, and pleasure. He doesn’t just love us; He loves us because we are in Jesus Christ. Standing in grace means that, I don’t have to prove I am worthy of God’s love, God is my perfect father, in relationship with Him and the door is permanently open to Him, made possible by the Cross.

Here the cross does not demonstrate the indifference of God, a cruel father who let the innocent Jesus be taken by wicked men, tortured, and crucified while he did nothing, but instead the Father and Christ are one. It is the love of God that the cross shows, the mutual experience of Father, Son and Holy Spirit joining in the pain and death of a human being, in the death of every human being before and since.

The experience of Jesus on the cross and subsequent resurrection is God’s ultimate proof of His father’s love for him and for each of us. He may give additional proof, but He can give no greater proof. If the cross is the ultimate demonstration of God’s love, it is also the ultimate demonstration of man’s hatred, and the Resurrection proves that the height of man’s hatred can’t defeat the height of God’s love.

The demonstration of God's love isn't displayed so much in that Jesus died, but it is seen in whom Jesus died for; and for whom He rose again; you and I and every human being to bring new life and hope to us all, reconciled to a loving, perfect, and eternal Father.

Thanks be to God. Amen