

## Father's Day Fathers' Day

*preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, June 17, 2012*

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Happy Fathers' Day. On Mothers' Day we gave out flowers. I'm not sure what we would give out on Fathers' Day – fishing lures... bar-b-q mitts... perhaps a cheap tie. Well, we don't do that here at St. Paul's on Fathers' Day. As a matter of fact usually we don't do anything about it at all. And, you know, *I'm* perfectly content with that, as are most of the fathers among us, I suspect. But I got to thinking about how one of the ways we name God, one of the ways we consistently talk about God, is as our Father. So this morning, I thought I'd say a little bit – and I do mean a *little* bit about why we always go around calling God “Father.”

Some of us are tempted to say, “Oh, big deal. So what? We call God ‘Father’ because that’s what it says in all the Bibles and the Prayer Book and stuff.” But as we know from all that ponderous discussion about the Trinity a couple of weeks ago, language *does* make a difference. The words we use, and the way we use them, shapes and defines and oftentimes limits the way we are able to think. Many of you know that I might legitimately be called “conservative” on many fronts. But on this issue, I suppose I might be pigeon-holed in the more “progressive” category, because I try to be careful about how I speak about human beings – and *particularly* about God.

For literally thousands of years, we have used almost exclusively masculine language when referring to God so that we all just kind of grow up with a certain image of God in mind. So, just to get it straight, and knowing I probably shouldn't have to say it at all, everyone of you knows that God is not *really* a gray-bearded, white-haired, though still very powerful, grandfather-looking fella' sitting on an oversized throne up there in heaven... right? When we really take the time to think about it, and when we're careful about how we speak about it, we know that God, being God – you know, “The Creator of all that is, seen and unseen,” – God cannot possibly be made out of... *stuff*. After all, God *created* all the stuff, so God had to be around independently of stuff. God, *being* God, just because God *is* God, is neither man *nor* woman – old and white-haired or not.

Okay, language *does* make a difference. So, here on Father's Day, let's give it a little thought. Why *do* we call God “Father?”

First, we call God “Father” because God created us. Regardless how we might think God used the processes of change, or how long we might think it took God to get to humankind, we *know* from Scripture, tradition *and* reason that we are *not* the result of some cosmic accident. In God's revelation of our creation, set into story by careful users of language in the Book of Genesis, it says that we members of the human race are made in the image and likeness of God. Every now and then I run into some relative or friend of the family that I haven't seen I a long time and I am so delighted when they say to me, “You look just like your Father.” Likewise, being made in the image and likeness of God doesn't mean that God looks like *us*, thanks be to God, but that we look like *God*. Being made in the image and likeness of God means that at our core, in the essence of who we are, what it means to be human, our souls and our minds and our wills and our ability and our *necessity* to love, all display our connection to the One who has given us life. When we turn our backs on God as the source of everything that makes us truly human, we begin to lose our humanity all together. We call God “Father” because there is a family resemblance.

Secondly, we call God “Father” because God provides for us. As I grew up the oldest of five kids, we lived on my Father's meager salary as a public school teacher. Extras were scarce – we ate mac-and-cheese not because it came from a blue box, but because it was what we could afford at the end of the month. But for all that, I cannot remember a single *need* that wasn't met by my Father. We all know, though, that not *all* human fathers do such a good job of providing for their children. We wouldn't have to go to the other side of the world to find fathers who consume whatever they have for their own needs and

desires, so that little or nothing is left for their children. We wouldn't have to leave this land of plenty to find fathers from all walks of life, who simply turn a blind eye on the responsibilities of truly *being* a father. And tragically, I doubt that we would have to go more than a mile or so to find fathers who will go to sleep this very night in tears because their children go to sleep hungry. But let me tell you, our Father God *does* provide for each of those neglected and forgotten and hungry children. The problem is that the Father's provisions are often in your hands and mine – and we aren't always very good at sharing. We call God "Father" because, even when we aren't very good at cooperating with God's bountiful goodness, we receive anyway.

Finally, we call God "Father" because, in addition to the love shared eternally by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, *we* have a relationship with God. I am forever grateful that my relationship with my Father had grown by leaps and bounds in the last year of his life, and that my memory of our last parting, as I headed back to school and he back to Phoenix, is that we kissed each other. But as regrettable as it may be, not all of us had or *have* a nurturing, caring, loving relationship with our earthly fathers. For some, Fathers' Day is a reminder of something that they *never* had. For some, this holiday is a reminder of promises made, but not kept. For some, it is a reminder of what we once had – but now, for one reason or another, have lost. Sadly, for some, this Hallmark holiday is a reminder of the pain and suffering and shame of abuse or rejection. In twisting love into ourselves, we find ways to hurt worst the ones who love us most. But in spite of the regret, or the loss, or even the anger that we might feel for the all-too-human fathers we have known here, we call God "Father" because it is in that *relationship* that we finally come to know the true meaning of unconditional, unmitigated, uncompromising love. We call God "Father" because our Father God *is* love.

Of course, if you haven't already figured it out, everything I've just said could just as easily be said if we called God Mother – instead or as well. But today is Fathers' Day. If you can, give your father a cheap tie, or a bar-b-q mitt – and maybe a hug. And then remember that today and *every* day is *the* Father's day. Today and every day we are enfolded by a love that knows no bounds, a love that knows no limits, a love that knows no ending. Today and every day is the Father's day – let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.