

Rev. Dr. Jim Gill

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“Fathers of Faith”

Psalm 8 Proverbs 8:1-4 Romans 5:1-5 John 16:12-15

One day a young father was shopping in a crowded super-market. His three-year old son was with him. The little boy was riding in the grocery cart and he was misbehaving terribly and causing all kinds of problems.

If the cart went close to the shelves, the three-year old boy would just rake stuff off onto the floor. At one point, the little boy crawled out of the cart and ran down the aisle (knocking over every display he could get his hands on) with his father in hot pursuit.

People who were in the store at the time could hear the father saying out loud over and over, “Just be patient, Tommy. It won’t be much longer Tommy. It’ll be O.K., Tommy. Be calm, Tommy. Hang in there, Tommy.”

Finally, a distinguished looking woman came up to the man and she said: “I just want to compliment you. I’ve been watching you and I want you to know that I admire you and the remarkable patience you have with little Tommy.”

The man said, “You don’t understand.” His name is Michael. I’m Tommy!!!”

Last month we gave thanks for Mothers. Today is a day for appreciating fathers- Our Father who art in heaven, for fathers who have gone to heaven, for fathers who aren’t in heaven YET, and for our fathers of faith.

This week I made a phone call to a couple who visited us last week. I got their voice mail. As I was introducing myself I said, “This is Jim Gill the pastor of Faith Presbyteri..... I’m sorry, Faith Lutheran Church in Dickinson. Then I had to explain to a voice mail that I had been serving Faith Presbyterian in Baytown for several years and sometime I relapse into following the word Faith with Presbyterian out of force of habit. But whether we are Presbyterian or Lutheran we all have some of the same fathers of faith.

As I wrote in my Thursday Faith Lift the idea for creating a day for children to honor their fathers began in Spokane, Washington. A woman by the name of Sonora Smart Dodd thought of the idea for Father's Day while listening to a Mother's Day sermon in 1909.

Having been raised by her father after her mother died, Sonora wanted her father to know how special he was to her. Her father, William Jackson Smart, was a single parent who raised his six children after her mother died in childbirth. He was a courageous, selfless, and loving man, and she thought that fathers should get recognition, too. ...equal time right dads?

This last week we observed our first International National Basketball Association Finals. For the first time a team from another country played and actually won our National competition. The Toronto Raptors defeated the Golden State Warriors.

When it comes to Baseball I've always thought it odd that we call it the World Series when unlike the World Cup, only one Nation participates. Who knows? Maybe one day the Astros might play the Montreal Expos we and we might even have an International World Series,

Tim Burke saw his boyhood dream come true the day he was signed to pitch for the Montreal Expos. After four years in the minors, he was finally given a chance to play in the big leagues. And he quickly proved to be worth his salt setting a record for the most relief appearances by a rookie player.

Along the way Tim and his wife, Christine had adopted four children with very special needs: two daughters from South Korea, a handicapped son from Guatemala, and another son from Vietnam. All of the children were born with very serious illnesses or defects. Neither Tim nor Christine was prepared for the tremendous demands such a family would bring. With the grueling schedule of major-league baseball Tim was seldom around to help. So only three months after signing a contract with the Cincinnati Reds, Tim decided to retire.

When pressed by reporters to explain this decision, he simply said, "Baseball is going to do just fine without me. But I'm the only father my children have. Tim retired from baseball in order to be a father to his children.

Not every man can be a biological father. Some who can have not been good ones like Sonora Smart Dodd's father. Some of us had fathers who made sacrifices to be great fathers like Tim Burke. Some struggle to keep it together like Tommy in the grocery store.

Because of Sonora Smart Dodd today is day we celebrate Father's Day, but in the church calendar it also the festival day of celebrating the Holy Trinity. On this festival, we celebrate one of the great treasures and mysteries of the church — the Doctrine of The Holy Trinity. Every day is a day we celebrate that we have a heavenly Father who so loved the world that he gave his ONLY Son that whosoever believed in him would have eternal life. Whosoever has room for folks like us.

Last Sunday which was Pentecost Sunday I talked about how people who speak different languages have a hard time understanding each other. When it comes to the Trinity even those who speak the same language have a hard time understanding or explaining it.

The term "Trinity" was first used by Theophilus of Antioch around 80 AD. Then the doctrine itself was hammered out at the Council of Nicea in 325 AD and the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD. 1)

In the Great Commission, Jesus instructs his disciples to baptize "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). The apostle Paul underscores the reality of the Trinity in 2 Corinthians 13:13, with a blessing to the Corinthian church, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you." In our gospel today, John writes, "The Spirit, sent by the Father, reveals God's truth by giving glory to the Son ... making the Son known."

In our Confirmation Class last Wednesday Marta Durham developed a Scavenger Hunt about places of note on our church campus and one of the items the students had to find was the "Luther Rose." I had never heard of the Luther Rose and was delighted to discover that there are two of them on the opening doors of this sanctuary. I knew that John Calvin, who is considered the founder of the Reformed Theology that led to Presbyterians starting in Scotland via John Knox, had a TULIP, but I didn't know that Martin Luther had a Rose.

John Calvin's TULIP was an acronym that represented 5 points of his theology: Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irrresistible Grace and Perseverance of the Saints. Luther's ROSE isn't an acronym. It is a symbol that he commissioned to illustrate and sum up his theology—a black cross inside a red heart in the middle of a white rose in a blue field surrounded by a golden ring. Whether we had a good example of a father, in Luther and Calvin we have great fathers of faith.

Jesus said in our gospel reading, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (v. 13). The Holy Spirit is here in this place. The Holy Spirit is as close as your heartbeat. The Holy Spirit is at work in and through the word of God, the sacraments, and the people of God. When we feel our faith is fainting, the Holy Spirit gets to work making believers out of us. When we don't feel generous with our tithes or time or talents the Holy Spirit is at work making good stewards out of us. Even when we don't feel very loving, the Holy Spirit is busy creating lovers out of us. The Holy Spirit gives us strength to believe, to persevere and to hold on to hope.

There's an awe-inspiring story that comes out of the 1989 earthquake which almost flattened Armenia. In the midst of all the confusion of the earthquake, a father rushed to his son's school. When he arrived, he discovered the building was flat as a pancake.

Standing there looking at what was left of the school, the father remembered a promise he made to his son, "No matter what, I'll always be there for you!" Tears began to fill his eyes. It looked like a hopeless situation, but he could not take his mind off his promise.

Remembering that his son's classroom was in the back right corner of the building, the father rushed there and started digging through the rubble. As he was digging other grieving parents arrived, clutching their hearts, saying: "My son! "My daughter!" They tried to pull him off of what was left of the school saying: "It's too late!" "They're dead!" "You can't help!" "Go home!" Even a police officer and a fire fighter told him he should go home. To everyone who tried to stop him he said, "Are you going to help me now?" They did not answer him and he continued digging for his son stone by stone.

This father dug for eight hours and then twelve and then twenty-four and then thirty-six. Finally, in the thirty-eighth hour, as he pulled back a boulder, he heard his son's voice. He screamed his son's name, "ARMAND!" and a voice answered him, "Dad?" It's me Dad!" Then the boy added these priceless words,

"I told the other kids not to worry. I told them that if you were alive, you'd save me and when you saved me, they'd be saved. You promised that, Dad. 'No matter what,' you said, 'I'll always be there for you!' And here you are Dad. You kept your promise!" That little boy's faith was greater than his fear.

Like Tommy, the new father in the grocery store, we need God's perfect love to remind us "Just be patient, it won't be much longer. It'll be O.K., Be calm, Hang in there," Like Tim Burke who retired from baseball to be a better father we need to place more value in the people in our lives than the things that money can buy. Like the father digging in the aftermath of the earthquake in Armenia we need to not listen to those telling us to give up.

Even though we still must face obstacles and crises, we do not face them alone. Together with them we can turn what is hurtful into helpful. Together we can break addictions and the lust for power over others. Together we can support and care for those who are ill and especially those who are mentally ill. Together we can break the curse of hate and be freed from the grip of greed. Together we can continue to gather to celebrate our Father in Heaven. Together we can give thanks for fathers who are in heaven and who aren't in heaven yet. Together we can give thanks for TULIPS and ROSES-- for our Presbyterian AND Lutheran ... fathers of faith. If a father is one who creates, and sustains life; if a father is one who provides and cares for others; if a father is one who lives for children we can all be fathers of faith. We may not be biological fathers. We may not be the theological fathers of denominations like Luther or Calvin that try to explain the Trinity, but together through the power of the Spirit we can witness to the Son and, inspired by the beauty and glory of our heavenly Father's world we too can be ... fathers of faith.

1. 1. Sermons for Sundays after Pentecost (First Third): Veni, Spiritus Sanctus, Veni, by Arley K. Fadness