

Third Sunday after Pentecost
FATHERS' DAY – June 21, 2009
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Fathers' Day is a pretty special day for most fathers. I say "most", because we do have to make allowances for those fathers with teen-agers.

Fathers' Day began about a hundred years ago, but things did not go well at first. Newspapers ridiculed the idea of a "Fathers' Day".

By way of contrast, "Mothers' Day" was greeted with open arms. It wasn't until the manufacturers of men's clothing realized the potential in such a day that it got financial backing.

Although I remember reading some advice from a columnist who said, "Do not ever buy your father something you see in "Gentlemen's Quarterly" for Fathers' Day".

Maybe the resistance to Fathers' Day being added to the calendar stems from the fact that men have always had the upper hand. The three religions of the Book – Judaism, Christianity and Islam - are all patriarch-oriented faiths. They all start out with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God is thought of as a man in these religious circles – any doubts – just look at the creation scene on the ceiling of Sistine Chapel and there he is – God - beard and all!

Although, there is one exception in the Bible to God being seen as male.

When we recall the creation stories in Genesis, usually the first story that comes to mind - the one you often hear at weddings – is the one where God creates Adam first – then all the other creatures – and finally God fashions Eve from one of Adam's ribs. It is ironic, and disturbing, that in several surveys, the majority of people in America still think that a man has one less rib than a woman. They have even found first year medical students who think so.

But, by way of contrast, in the first chapter of Genesis – in the other story of creation - Adam and Eve are created at the same time. The text reads, **Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...So God created man in his own image...male and female he created them. (1:26,27).** This creation story implies that the godhead contains the essence of both the male and the female.

However, this passage from scripture is the exception. Everywhere else in the Bible, God is a male, and the religious traditions are fully vested in male dominance. Men have the wealth. Men have the wives. Men have the children. In fact, if a woman was barren she was not considered a complete woman. That is why Sara was so despondent when she got old and still didn't have a child.

But one shouldn't give up hope – remember when Sara was ninety she bore Isaac and - not only that - but the Bible says that her husband was so old that he was “as good as dead”.

Again, men controlled these religions for centuries. It is only in the past forty years that women have been ordained as Protestant and Jewish clergy. They still aren't in Orthodox Judaism and in Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christianity. Not to mention the severe restrictions on women in Islam. **“NO WOMEN ALLOWED”**, is writ big over these institutions.

Even our secular institutions are seriously male dominated – from our Supreme Court - to our Congress - to our presidency.

So with all this power why wasn't Fathers' Day a shoe-in like Mothers' Day? Well – I think that deep in our hearts we realize that our mothers really carry the day – and the night - when we were growing up. For the most part, they were the source of food – especially desserts – and stories – and getting us to everything we had to get to.

And, even though men dominated the church, a whole significant tradition grew up around Mary, Jesus' mother. Biblically, she doesn't come off too well except for the Magnificat – which for the most part is a quotation from the song of Hannah in I Samuel. Jesus dismisses Mary and his brothers when they come to see him. In the first three gospels, all the women and the disciples desert Jesus – they stand at a distance from the crucifixion because they were afraid of the mob.

But, in the Middle Ages, the church came to celebrate Mary and to lift her up in the traditions of the church. In part, this was to counter the negative role of women as a temptress – thinking that comes from Eve's role in tempting Adam to eat the apple. It could also be that Mary rose in prominence because the religions of the Bible are the only religions in the world that do not have a female component in the godhead – and so it made sense to add a feminine element.

So – the church got a woman – Mary - to break the glass ceiling of the church. And, America got sentimental about fathers. And that's o.k., because men need to loosen up a bit. When Tony Soprano started to see a psychologist, the number of men going for therapy doubled. Men need all the help they can get, but they sometimes think it isn't the “man” thing to do.

But, in our faith tradition, it's all right. It's OK to cry – and it's OK to say you need help. And it is OK to confess your sins and to say, “I'm sorry God – please forgive me.”

You know, it isn't easy to be a good father these days. There aren't too many good role models for men. Athletes covered with tattoos and plagued by arrest records don't cut the mustard. Congressmen with a roving eye and a penchant for payoffs create a negative model. Businessmen who used to be models of hard work and discipline are now models of moneymaking schemes that have left millions without pensions. Not to mention the

church in Ireland and its scandals. No, it isn't easy to be a father these days because there are only a few good models out there.

Still fathers try. They try to be the best parents possible – but don't forget our fathers' fathers weren't perfect either – and it all goes back to Adam and Eve and the apple.

But, Jesus knew that fathers did their best. Remember the forgiving father of the prodigal son? Remember Jesus saying,

“What man, if his son asks for a loaf of bread will give him a stone?” And so Jesus reminds us that our heavenly Father cares for us all.

I know that mothers do what they have to do, but fathers do what they can do.

In our faith fathers are celebrated not as patriarchs and gods – but as creatures of God with all the grandeur and weaknesses found in all created things. And it is appropriate to stop once a year and say “Thanks Dad!”