

Father's day sermon (Revision: 6/24/09)

Reflections on Fatherhood Bill Lakin

Today is Fathers' Day. The quintessential Hallmark Holiday. Noteable for sending dad a card and a tie....or I my case tools. Father's Day is used by retailers to increase business with "Dad's Day Sales. It's not nearly as popular as Mother's Day—the best day in the year for restaurant industry.

Nor has it ever been. According to Wikipedia: "Father's Day was inaugurated in the early twentieth century to complement Mother's Day in celebrating fatherhood and male parenting, and to honor and commemorate fathers and forefathers: It also noted that Father's Day is celebrated on a variety of dates worldwide and typically involves gift-giving, special dinners to fathers, and family-oriented activities."

The first observance of Father's Day is believed to have been held on July 5, 1908 in a church located in Fairmont, West Virginia, by Dr. Robert Webb of West Virginia at the Central United Methodist Church of Fairmont.^[1]

Independently, a Mrs. Sonora Smart Dodd of Washington thought of the holiday one Sunday in 1909 while listening to a Mother's Day sermon at the Central Methodist Episcopal Church at Spokane,^[2] and she arranged a tribute for her father on June 19, 1910. She was the first to solicit the idea of having an official Father's Day observance to honor all fathers.

It took a long time to make the holiday official. In spite of support from the YWCA, the YMCA and churches, it ran the risk of disappearing from the calendar.

Father's Day was seen as just the first step in filling the calendar with mindless promotions like "Grandparents' Day", "Professional Secretaries' Day", etc., all the way down to "National Clean Your Desk Day".^[3]

The holiday was gathering attention, but for the wrong reasons. It was the target of much satire, parody and derision

A bill was introduced in 1913, US President Calvin Coolidge supported the idea in 1924, and a national committee was formed in the 1930s by trade

groups in order to legitimize the holiday.. It was made a federal holiday when President Lyndon Johnson issued a proclamation in 1966.

In the meantime, Mother's day a revered day. Father's day a joke
How come mom gets better treatment?

Generally moms are primary caregivers --- and are probably more demonstrative.

In my generation, "Dad" was the authority figure who went out to work, was gone from the home and was the "enforcer" --- "Wait 'til your father gets home"

Over the years, the media portrayal of fathers have gone from Robert Young, Ozzie Nelson and Ward Cleaver to Archie Bunker and Homer Simpson --- In the standard TV plot line, mom remains the parent with common sense--- And with exceptions such as Bill Cosby's Dr. Huxtable)--- dads are portrayed as not too bright, lazy, uses poor judgment, and then lies to cover up his mistakes —and by the end of the episode---the lies were always exposed and the man of the house shamed.

So----with all of this ---(He asked rhetorically,) Is Fathers' day relevant?

I think so. I think maybe we need to consider fathers' day to not only honor fathers but to look at what fatherhood means.

Being parents – ain't for sissies ----- and is probably getting tougher...

We just saw "Marley" and the movie reminded me of the enormous turmoil and stress that children bring to a relationship. Nobody is *really* ready for kids and understands how much it changes the parents lives.

Fatherhood is evolving with lots more responsibilities and involvement.

When my first children were born in the 50s, expectant fathers paced outside the maternity ward chain smoking and then passed out cigars after "the happy event" (Probably wasn't that happy for mom)

At my last son's birth, my wife and I went to la Maze classes, practiced those "pant-blows" at home. And at the birth, I gowned and was part of the delivery team—encouraging her to "push" and talking her through delivery.

There are far more fathers who are the homemakers while the mother works outside the home to support the family. The whole notion of fathering has undergone major changes. In the world we live in today we

find single fathers, step fathers, happy fathers, not so happy fathers, fathers in alcohol or drug recovery, divorced fathers, depressed fathers, homeless fathers, undocumented immigrant fathers, military fathers—specially those fathers who are serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, or wherever they are stationed that keeps them separated from their families. There are jailed fathers, gay fathers,

In my own family, I'm a father with four sons – three of them are fathers -- One is married with three daughters , one brought up his son as a single father and one is bringing up an adopted son with his partner.

As yet, there are not many same-sex married fathers, but we are still working on making that change.

No matter which category he may fall in, all fathers today face tremendous pressures. The unprecedented shift toward consumerism and the cash flow that is needed to sustain it, puts pressure on moms and dads to bring home more money.

Parents commute to and from work to consume multiple hours out of each workday—whether it is by the mother or the father, or, very likely both? How unusual is it today for a father to be unemployed for long periods? A father today is asked to play even more roles than in previous times: he is the primary anti-drug educator, sex-educator.

At the same time, a lot hasn't changed much at all. Many of us are not able to look back with fond memories toward the man who fathered us. There are still fathers who can't understand why their daughter or son is living life the way they do. There were and still are fathers who don't support the mothers of their children, or who abandon their children all together. There are still fathers who act violently toward wives and children. There are still cycles of maltreatment that teach the wrong message to children and need to be broken.

In today's reading from Luke, known as the story of the prodigal son, the father had unbounded love and could forgive all the transgressions of his younger son.

To finish the story--- the other "Good" brother complained why was the father treating such a no good son so well when he – had not strayed?

The "Dad always like you best" Syndrome

And as a father of twins who still makes sure Christmas and Birthday presents are different – but equal in value ---- to the penny

The father admonished the brother: “My son, you are always with me and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” That is Fatherly love! For the Judeo-Christian world, this father is a mythological father. He sets a standard for all fathers to follow. Not all of meet those standards.

What are some of the attributes that might make up a perfect father in this world. To begin with, he would have to be a loving father with a big heart.

A heart so big that it can cope with anything his child may demand of him;

- A heart that is filled with compassion when his daughter cries in the night because of a painful ear infection that just won't relent;
- He would always find time to spend with each child.
- He would also be an expert mediator when his children get into endless arguments and neither one is willing to concede. And to use that experience as a teaching tool to teach values and ethics.
- He would be an eternal optimist and believe in his children through all their endeavors.
- Of course, he would accept them exactly as they are: unique creations with all their faults, imperfections, potential, fears and demands.
- He would teach his sons by his own actions to respect women
- By his example, his daughters and sons would learn about the importance of ethics and values
- Encourage them to chase their own dreams and not measure “success” by money or power.

We fathers don't always meet these standards – few do --- and certainly I didn't – but most of us tried.

I hope during your brief meditation this morning—you were able to reconnect with your father –to either thank him or forgive him.

Here's an email I received this week from Stan Cooper, one of our members: (read Email)

Would anyone like to share some thoughts about their father?

So I think Father's day is relevant. We need to honor and thereby encourage fathers'--- in their quest of one of the hardest things they'll ever do – becoming a great dad!

So to all of you who are fathers – are related to a father – even know a father

Happy Father's Day