

Pentecost Proper 6, June 17, 2018. Father's Day. St. Augustine's in-the-Woods Episcopal Church Freeland WA. Nigel Taber-Hamilton. Ezekiel 17:22-24; 2 Corinthians 5:6-17; Mark 4:26-34

Happy Father's Day! It seems to me that it's entirely appropriate that on this Father's Day, our Collect for the Day invites us out of love to proclaim the truth with boldness, and justice with compassion.

Here we are – finally – at Father's day. I know this because that's what's been in all the TV ads in the last – what – months?! Tools. Watches. Golf clubs. Ties. Electronic toys. Ah! Father's Day! Not what's advertised for Mother's Day, is it?! Look it's history up on the internet and the ads on the pages are for – well, do I need to tell you?! (“Tractor Supply”). Did you know we invented Father's Day? By “we” I mean the state of Washington – we were the first state in the country to celebrate Father's Day. That happened in 1910.

I like to contrast all the Father's Day commercials with the ones you see around Mother's Day – there's a distinct difference. One ad in particular that begins with dad and the kids making mom breakfast in bed (and really messing up the kitchen). What does that say?! That mom's role is to make the breakfast every day, so today – today only – she gets the day off?

In our day, the theme of both days is this: commercialism. The first commercial celebration of Mother's Day was in 1908 when the John Wanamaker department store in Philadelphia sponsored a service dedicated to mothers in its auditorium. And it took less than one year for America's retailers to figure out that “there's gold in them thar hills!” It took them less than a year to wonder if they might not be able to mine the other half of humanity – if there was a Father's Day, of course! And the rest, as they say, is history!

Never let it be said that astute politicians pay no attention to social trends! Can you say “bandwagon?!” After some typical political maneuvering, President Woodrow Wilson approved a resolution that made the second Sunday in May a holiday in honor of “that tender, gentle army, the mothers of America.” Mother's Day was born as an Official holiday.

And – all you mothers out there – you might ask (I hope you do), “whatever happened to the original intent of the post-Civil War “Mother's Day Proclamation” which was about mothers rising up and ending war, about peace and reconciliation? To which President Wilson – and, today, a whole bunch of other straight, white, men – essentially say to you: “Oh don't you worry your pretty little heads about that!”

Anna Jarvis is credited with the formal origination of Mother's Day after her mother died in 1905. Anna remembered something her mother hoped for: that a memorial would be founded to celebrate “...the matchless service [every mother] renders to humanity in every field of life.” Notice that last phrase: “in every field of life.” not in the traditional parenting role, but “every field of life.” But once Mother's Day was established in 1908 Anna spent the rest of her life trying to get it killed! She especially hated, she said, the “candy, flower, and card” companies who she saw as exploiting the day. She called them “profiteers, charlatans, bandits, pirates,

racketeers, kidnappers, and termites!” Tell me how you really feel!

It’s obvious that the founding of Father’s Day is tied to Mother’s Day. Mother’s Day became the celebration its founder didn’t want, because it was exploited and it’s real meaning lost to commercialism. Father’s Day wasn’t so easily started. Not because men hate commercialism!! Rather, it was because many men held the idea of a Father’s Day in contempt. As American historian Timothy Marr writes, men “scoffed at the holiday’s sentimental attempts to domesticate manliness with flowers and gift-giving, or they derided the proliferation of such holidays as a commercial gimmick to sell more products—often paid for by the father himself.” Notice who controls the purse-strings here...! And that men and “domestication” are seen as antithetical. After all, who would want their manliness domesticated?

Anna Jarvis wanted to celebrate her mother as someone whose “matchless service...to humanity [is rendered] in every field of life; NOT only as a parent of a child. Yet soft sentimentality and “pretty little heads” became the order of the day. And men didn’t want to celebrate fathers, because it threatened their “manliness”! I’d say that we’re ankle-deep here in stereo-typing!

We live in a Patriarchal culture. The best way I can define patriarchy in a short sentence is this: “Father knows best”! We’ve lived out of patriarchy for perhaps six thousand years, when human beings in Mesopotamia first left their fields and started living in cities. Before that time, there were not entities called “kings,” and the gods weren’t exclusively male, but were both male and female – in fact more female than male.

Some religious cultures have fought against patriarchy. The first Israelites, who had escaped patriarchy in Egypt and Canaan decided right away that – to paraphrase a line from an old Humphrey Bogart movie (“The Treasure of Sierra Madre”) “we don’t need no stinkin’ king.” Of course, patriarchy won out with Saul and David and Solomon, though after them, everything went downhill! Yet for many centuries after – including up to Jesus’ time – Israelite families shared many of the roles that until very recently modern culture has considered gender-specific. Think of the Dick Van Dyke show – with Laura as the “home-maker.” This doesn’t work, just that it was “domestic” work – which I take to mean that they just didn’t get paid! We’re still dealing with the stubborn, lingering effects of that rampant patriarchy today – because we still live in a patriarchal society, where straight, white men rule. Just yesterday a report came out showing that the top 100 highest earning athletes are all men, for instance.

So – today’s gospel! You probably thought we’d never get there! While Mark uses “he” to describe the farmer, it would just have likely have been “she.” Men and women shared the load; that’s how the culture worked. Today – if you earn the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour – you have to work 122 hours a week to earn enough to be able to afford a modest 2-bedroom apartment ANYWHERE in this country. “Home-making” isn’t an option, just as it wasn’t in Jesus’ time. Yet patriarchy’s unrealistic, exploitative, idolized vision still – like the evil “One Ring” – rules us all.

In Jesus’ time, and in his story, we see an alternate vision. On the one side, the “strict father,” (read the Shammi-ite Pharisees, or the Saducees, or the Romans – empires are all about

patriarchy) who make the rules, and who enforce them, regardless of any mitigating factors. These are the folk who separate parents from children at the borders of our nation. This is not how people of faith are called to function - and that's reflecting in the response of every major denomination (including the very conservative Southern Baptist Convention) that what the current Administration is doing is simply wrong – unethical – and un-Christian. The Jewish and the Muslim communities have responded in exactly the same way, as have Buddhists, Hindus – and the list goes on.

Often the Strict Father enforce his will through violence. He occasionally makes exceptions, but only as a way of expressing his ultimate life-and-death power over others. When you live that way you can trust no one but yourself. For the Strict Father, it's all about power over others – all others. What a sad, lonely place to be!

On the other side, the Nurturing Parent (think, Jesus – of course!), who places compassion and relationship over law; peace over violence, love over self-centered agrandizment, humility over arrogance and egoism. Family, here, means something where responsibility is shared, and where roles are simply different, not more or less important than each other. This hasn't been a popular vision in human history – at least not among the men who have controlled it. Yet, like the tiny mustard seed, it has the potential to be something that provides a nest – a home – for humanity to grow, protected from patriarchy's scorching heat.

This nation's founders struggled with this dichotomy – With the ancient Israelites, they too shouted that “we don't need no stinkin' king.” Rather, a president, whose powers are balanced; and a government “of the people, by the people, for the people.” Not, notice, “Of men, by men, for men.” All the people. That's the vision. We're not there yet; the experiment continues; two steps forward, one back; sometimes three back. The closer we come to the Jesus vision – the nurturing Parent vision – the idea of liberty and justice for all – the more the Powers and Principalities struggle and fight against it.

The Father's Day envisioned back in this State in 1910 – rather like the one that overpowered and appropriated Anna Jarvis' original vision for a Mother's Day – are ultimately the products of a rampant, patriarchal commercialism that is antithetical to our Christian vision rooted in Jesus. If we're to celebrate a Father's Day as Christians, then – with Mother's Day – let it be a day when we commit ourselves to rise up with humility and compassion in the cause of peace and reconciliation, proclaiming the love of the One who nurtures and loves us, each and every one, without restriction, and without conditions; without heartless actions and intentional violence; with love and with compassion. So let us proclaim the truth of Father's Day (and Mother's Day) with boldness, and let us do justice with compassion out of that truth, because that's what it means to be truly faithful.