

Father's Day

June 19, 2022

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Happy Father's Day to all fathers, stepfathers, grandfathers, and anyone who has served as an adult male mentor to a child. Father's Day is not a Christian holiday but a secular one in our culture. Today is the 112th anniversary of the first Father's Day celebration in the nation. And any day in which we celebrate and honor God our Father is a true Father's Day.

Today also commemorates this date in 1865 when the enslaved people of Texas were told by Army Major General Gordon Granger in Galveston, Texas that they were free. The Emancipation Proclamation had been signed two years before but no slaves had been freed until the Civil War ended in April of 1865. Today is a federal holiday, the newest in our country, which marks that milestone.

Now, the very first Father's Day memorial service was held on July 5, 1908, in Fairmont West Virginia (southeast of Morgantown). It honored the hundreds of men, and especially fathers, who were killed in the worst mining accident in U.S. history in nearby Monongah, West Virginia where 361 miners died in December of 1906.

But it wasn't until 1909 when Sonora Dodd of Washington State proposed a special day to honor all fathers, that the day to remember fathers really started. Sonora Dodd was inspired by Anna Jarvis who originated Mother's Day. Ms. Dodd's father, William Jackson Stuart, was a farmer and Civil War veteran. In 1898, when Ms. Dodd was only 16 years old, her mother died giving birth to her sixth child,

leaving her father a widower and a single parent. Mr. Stuart was left to raise the newborn baby and five of the children on his rural farm in eastern Washington State. While attending a Mother's Day church services in 1909, as an adult at the age of 27, Ms. Dodd realized the strength and selflessness sacrifice her father had shown in raising her and her six younger brothers and proposed to the ministers of the churches of Spokane, Washington, her hometown, that there be an observance to recognize all fathers.

The first Father's Day was officially observed on June 19, 1910, 112 years ago today. Sonora, herself delivered presents to handicapped fathers, boys from the local YMCA wore roses on their lapels, red for living fathers and white for those who had died. News of this observance in Spokane spread across the country and other towns and cities started to celebrate the day. In 1916, President Wilson and his family joined in the observance. Eight years later President Calvin Coolidge signed a Congressional resolution to observe the day which read in part "to recognize the importance of closer relations between children and their fathers" and in 1966 President Lyndon Johnson signed an executive order making the 3rd Sunday in June the date of Father's Day in the U.S. In 1972, 50 years ago, Congress passed an act making Father's Day a national holiday and President Nixon signed the bill. Six years later in 1978, Sonora Dodd died at the age of 96.

Today, many of us will honor our fathers and thank them for their sacrifices for us. Most of us can only remember our temporal fathers who have gone to glory. Some are unable to do either for a variety of reasons. Some honor someone other than their biological father for the fatherly

care they showed to them. No matter the situation for you, we all have a heavenly father to honor today who made a sacrifice for us as well, His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

In the reading this morning from Galatians, the underlying reason for both of these observances appear 1) freedom from slavery; and 2) honor to God, our Father. St. Paul uses two analogies from the culture of his day to talk about the process by which God, our spiritual Father, caused people to move from childhood to adulthood in faith. Not unlike how our temporal fathers or father surrogates did for us.

In Paul's day, it was common in Roman homes for children between the ages of 6 and 16 to be under the care of a guardian (Greek word was paidagogos). We get the English word "pedagogue" from it. A pedagogue is a teacher, especially a dogmatic or pedantic one. In the Roman home, this guardian escorted, supervised, and protected the children from evil influences and demanded their obedience. There probably were many pedagogues who were known for their kindness and were held in affection by the children in their care, but the dominant image of them was of a harsh disciplinarian who frequently resorted to physical force and corporal punishment as a way of keeping his children in line.

This is the view of the Law that St. Paul uses for us. The Law was given by God to protect his people and to teach them His ways. It was demanding and harsh but God saw the need. God, our Father, who created us, just as our temporal father created us, wanted the best for His children. He saw that left on our own we would perish spiritually without rules. He saw that without the Law, we would be vulnerable and unprotected from Satan. So, in

His wisdom, He created those rules, the Law, for us to follow. Every good parent does the same. We know that a home without rules is chaos and children in such a home flounder looking for direction, guidance, and order. God recognized this with us too.

Now, fathers (and mothers) usually are viewed by their children as harsh when they enforce the rules of the family. How many of you have heard the term, "Dad laid down the law"? And how often have children responded with words like, "Why do we have to do this?" "I don't want to do that." "My friends don't have to do that!" Those were the same responses from God's people in the Old Testament and they are the same ones we still hear today. But, rules are not to be broken, because they are for the good of those to which they are applied.

In ancient times, while the child was under the supervision of a pedagogue, they were no different than a servant in the house. They were controlled. The pedagogues monitored their comings and goings, they accompanied them wherever they went and watched their behavior, especially their safe conduct to and from school and while at school. In this way, the children were not free. They were not unlike a slave in the house. They were constantly under the control of the pedagogues. They were not really free.

Yet, in the ancient Roman world, when a child was between the ages of 15 and 18, their father, at his discretion, would make the determination that a child should be given the status of an adult. He did this when he felt the child was mature enough to live in the world without the constant monitoring of a pedagogue. This

determination took place in the form of a ceremony that usually occurred in a spring festival called the “Liberalia.” At this ceremony, the child was officially adopted by the father, formally and legally recognized as his son (or daughter), and given the full rights of inheritance of the family estate. The father determined that at this time, intense rule enforcement is no longer necessary. Children were deemed wise enough to stay safe and act in a mature and orderly adult manner. In our culture, we usually grant the same status of maturity at age 18, after formal public education is over and confirmation and graduation have occurred. As a result, there is a new freedom that comes...we call that adulthood.

St. Paul then said, ***“When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons...and, if a son an heir through God.”*** God recognized that humans were unable to fulfill the requirements of the law so He sent His Son Jesus to do it for us. He also sent Jesus as the sacrifice for our continuing violations of His law. So, by our faith in the justification made through Jesus for our sins, we are made sons and daughters of God, adopted by God as one of His children through Jesus Christ and a brother (or sister) of Him in the family of God.

In Roman family life when a Roman male child reached "son" status, his father exchanged his toga bordered toga called a “praetexta” for a manly toga called a “toga virilis.” The “toga virilis” (manly toga) now identified the child as a responsible citizen. In verse 27, St. Paul compared that toga to Christ. ***“To put on Christ' is to become as Christ, to have his standing; in this context to become objects of the***

divine favor, sons of God, as he is the Son of God.” And we put on Christ in the waters of baptism.

In putting on Christ, we receive significant spiritual benefits. These spiritual blessings were foreshadowed in the promises given to Abraham and his offspring as heirs in Genesis. God promised Abraham He would make of him a great nation. As heirs of that promise, we receive membership in the kingdom of God. God promised Abraham perpetual blessing and protection. So, God blesses us with every blessing in Christ, and He guards and protects us from all evil. God promised to make Abraham a blessing to others. And, so we Christians, are called to be God’s channel of blessing to those around us. Finally, Abraham and his offspring were promised, the land of Canaan, which was to be theirs as an everlasting holding, they called it “The Promised Land.” We, too, have been promised an everlasting land, a “Promised Land,” heaven, inherited as God’s gift of eternal life. All this is our inheritance, but that was not all of the inheritance that we have been given as sons and daughters of God, our Father through Jesus Christ. God has sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts such that we can now call the most Almighty and awesome God, the creator, and sustainer of the universe, by the name of “Abba.” Abba is an Aramaic word equivalent to our word “Dad” or “Daddy.” It connotes the same sense of intimacy and closeness to God that we have with our temporal fathers. Such closeness and intimacy were unheard of in the Jewish faith.

God has dealt with humanity like loving fathers deal with their children. When children are young, having limited information and experience, a good father makes allowances for their immaturity, but when they become

mature, a father deals with them as adults. He showers his love, blessings, and wisdom on them as a loving father. Our loving Father in heaven does the same. As his sons and daughters, a loving father forgives them when they fail and our loving God does the same. A loving father is generous to his children giving them what they need. Our loving Father in heaven generously sees to our daily bread and feeds us from his Table in the Holy Supper. And loving fathers invite their children to come to their house to be with them. Our loving heavenly Father calls us, His adopted children in Christ, to His House each week. And then, when we have finished the work that He has set before us in this temporal time, He calls us to His Home in heaven to our rest in Him.

And, as our faith in our Heavenly Father matures, we become more aware of our God in our lives just as we become increasingly aware of the value of our temporal fathers. Mark Twain stated, "When I was 14, I couldn't stand having my dad around. When I was 21, I was amazed at how much he had learned."

When we apply this in our temporal lives to our earthly fathers, it may go like this: *"At age 5 – we think our Daddy can do anything; at age 8 – we think our Daddy knows everything; at age 12 – we think our Dad doesn't know anything about anything because he's too old to remember; at age 18 – we don't think we need to pay any attention to Dad, he's too old fashion; at age 21 – we think our Dad is hopelessly out of date; at age 30 - we think maybe I should ask Dad what he thinks, after all, he's had a lot of experience; at age 40 – we think 'I'm not doing a single thing until I talk to Dad!' and at age 60 we think 'I'd*

give anything if Dad were here now so I could talk this over with him.”

This is often the path of maturity in our spiritual lives as we pass through different stages in our relationship with our Heavenly Father. Although for many of us, our earthly fathers may not be around or available to give us advice, comfort, and direction, our Heavenly Father is always there. We only need to ask Him. And we can always look forward in faith to the promise of heaven and the hope of everlasting life with Him and all those we love including our temporal fathers.

May the joy of this day be yours with your father, or with your memories of him, remembering we are the adopted children of our Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, and one with Him and the Holy Spirit saying Abba Father. Amen.