

What can Trinity Sunday teach us about Father's Day?

Ps 93; Ex 3.1-6; Rom 8.12-17; Jn 3.1-16

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Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him." 3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." 4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' 8 The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit." 9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can this be?" 10 Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this? 11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." 16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

What do you think of on Father's Day? I think of the few but great times that I went with my dad on outings. I think of his helping me with projects. How he and his brother, my uncle, would fall asleep in their armchairs watching TV. All sorts of memories fill my mind concerning my father. I don't think that I've ever had the occasion to be here on Father's Day. But, last year, May 12, I was here for Mother's Day. I included in my sermon some thoughts on the origin of Mother's Day.

Here's a reminder of how Mother's Day began. About 20 years after the Civil War ended, a lady living in the hills of West Virginia attempted to create a day that would help the US to heal the scars created by the horrors of the war. She thought that where men had led the fight it was now time for the women to lead in the healing after the fight. That woman, Anna Jarvis' mother, died in 1905 without achieving her goal. But in 1907 Anna herself held a service in a little town in northern West Virginia, way back in the hills, far away from public view, honouring her mother's attempts. Though it happened far from the public thoroughfare, it caught on with such success and speed that people immediately began to celebrate "Mother's Day".

Less than 2 years later, in May of 1909, Sonora Louise Smart was sitting in a church service in Washington, on the other side of the US, listening to a sermon celebrating Mother's Day. But, instead of thinking of her mother, she thought of her father. Why didn't Sonora Smart think of her mother? Because her mother had died in childbirth. It was her father, William Jackson Smart, himself a Civil War veteran, who after the war and its devastation had returned home to raise her, along with her 5 brothers. And so, from the day of that church service on, Sonora Smart sought for a day not just to honour mothers but also one to honour fathers. The Spokane, Washington, YMCA sponsored the first celebration on June 19, 1910

and “in 1924 Calvin Coolidge recommended national observance of the third Sunday of June as a day “to impress upon fathers the full measure of their obligation” and strengthen intimate ties between fathers and children.”^[1]

I have some great memories of my parents: trips together, playing baseball, picnics, school activities. But, when I think back on occasions like Mother’s Day or Father’s Day to what really is burned into my thinking about my parents, what comes to me are the ways in which they loved me. The way my mother went back to work so that I could go to school and university. The way my father stood up for me when the school wanted to send me home because I wasn’t smart enough to do the work. The way they struggled and inched their way along to make sure that my sister and I could achieve our goals. Both Mother’s Day and Father’s Day were started by people who wanted to remember mothers and fathers who had had to cope with difficulties.

You know, it’s never been easy to be a mother or a father. The challenges are always there. From the time that a woman starts to experience the changes in her body due to pregnancy, and the husband begins to have to do more around the house than perhaps he was used to doing before... to the birth of the child and those sleepless nights, and concerns over budgets, and making sure the house is safe for the child ... to driving the kids everywhere, and making sure that their friends are reliable, and making sure that they’re safe... to those sleepless nights, and concerns over budgets, and..... being a father or a mother has never been easy. It’s always been that way.

My wife and I just relived the birth of our 22 year old daughter with her yesterday. I can still see her on the morning of June 13, 1981. But, one of the reasons it is so clear is that it followed Rachel’s 32 hour labour. The joy – and the relief – of Julia’s birth make June 13 a day that is burned in to our brains.

But, Mother’s Day and Father’s Day were created to remember fathers and mothers who were who they were not just in challenging times, even really challenging times, but in the extraordinarily extreme situation of devastation that the Civil War left behind.

Well, what does all this have to do with Trinity Sunday? What does all this have to do with the fact that we take one Sunday every year and remember the Trinity, which we always remember anyway, in every service that we have.

Well, it’s a bit like Mother’s Day or Father’s Day: we never forget that we have a mother or a father, but we take one day to remember that.

But are there any further parallels? Is Trinity Sunday like Mother’s Day or Father’s Day a day of remembrance for something extraordinarily difficult. I could say: well, we celebrate one particular Sunday to remember how extraordinarily difficult the doctrine of the Trinity is: one God, in three persons, each equal yet different, consisting of a Father, an unbegotten Son, and a Spirit.

But, joking aside, there is a parallel. For, the Trinity is involved in parenting us to full maturity.

Where do you and I have our life? Is it not from our creator God, who gives us both the life that we share with all of creation but also something that is so unique that we share it with no one else in creation except the other children of God, namely, the fact that we are born again by God, into a life that will not end with death and decay but will go on into everlasting life.

And how do we have this life, this eternal life? Is it not through the extraordinary war that the Son of God waged on our behalf, with death, with Satan, with sin, with all the powers of evil? By his speaking the word to us and by our receiving that word and letting it go deep into our hearts and transform us, is he not the Father's agent in bringing us beyond the war into the way of peace?

And how do we grow as children of God? When we struggle against our own fleshly passions, when we want the material things that this world offers but can only offer until we die, when we want to do what we have the power to do even though it's wrong, who are we really fighting against? Ourselves? No, for we want what we know we cannot or should not have. No, we are fighting against the Spirit, who is constantly urging us, tugging us, moving us to want and to do the right thing. It is the Spirit who receives our "slap in the face", our "get lost", our "God, don't watch me right now while I do this". It is the Spirit who gently returns to urge us on, ignoring the slap and the complaints, never giving up on us. Never.

The Trinity is all about bringing us to full perfection, to the full maturity of the sons and daughters of God. In spite of everything in this world that pulls us away from God, in spite of the cost, which will take Jesus' own life and give us ours.

Mother's Day is about the cost that mothers are willing to pay to bring peace to a devastated world.

Father's Day is about the cost that fathers are willing to pay when the world around us seems to collapse around us.

Trinity Sunday is about how far God is willing to go to create and bring to completion a family that will live together forever, in spite of the cosmic odds against it happening.

That's why we have a special day to remember the Trinity. Don't you think that it's a pretty good thing we do?

And now unto God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, be all honour and glory, from this time forth and forevermore.