

Trinity 2 Father's Day

17/06/07

2Sam 11.26-12.15; Galatians 2.15-end; Luke 7.36-8.3

Fatherhood What difference does it make to you? One found a new depth of love overriding selfish concerns, another spoke about the unexpected joy of love returned, another, of responsibility for balancing discipline and freedom. In Southall, Asian fathers used to be very strict and curb freedom, while Anglo-Saxon dads tended to be more liberal and relaxed in their approach to discipline.

2 Samuel: We can see both in God's attitude to David after his adultery with Bathsheba and his cheating Uriah the Hittite not only with his wife but with his life. For this adultery and murder God utterly scorned David and the prophet Nathan makes David aware of the dire consequences in his family and political life. You have done this evil in secret but you will be shamed openly before the whole of Israel. End of story? No. Nathan also speaks of forgiveness 'The Lord has put away your sin, you shall suffer the consequences but not die.

Psalm 51 attributed to David after this is a longing for forgiveness, mercy and truth, freedom from guilt, a fresh start – "create in me a clean heart O God ..." "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you will not despise.

Never underestimate guilt: Many have written about it:

Oh, my capacity for guilt is enormous. I'm all the time thinking I'm not doing the things I should be doing, not doing enough of it, or I said I'd be vice-president of something or other, and what I have I done? Nothing. **David Attenborough**
Guilt: the gift that keeps on giving. **Erma Bombeck**

The Negro needs the white man to free him from his fears. The white man needs the Negro to free him from his guilt. **Martin Luther King, Jr.**

I've met holocaust survivor victims, through other films, and I know what survivor guilt is like. **Ben Kingsley**

I have never smuggled anything in my life. Why, then, do I feel an uneasy sense of guilt on approaching a customs barrier? **John Steinbeck**

When we played softball, I'd steal second base, feel guilty and go back. **Woody Allen**

Guilt is a powerful tyrant which can torment us: Guilt about our colonial past, guilt about slavery, guilt about prosperity, guilt about the planet, guilt about contentment.

Galatians: Paul explains that the God's law is like Nathan the prophet showing David his failings. Nathan throws the book at David – you don't have a leg to stand on, guilty as charged. The law will always condemn us and we can never win. How unbearable if all those resolutions made at new year became the standard by which we were judged. How driven we would be if every year there was a SATS test on how we live our lives Look at those figures for idolatry, you are a failing Christian, we'll put you in special measures.

We don't have to do this because Christ died to set us free from the tyranny of the law which will always condemn sinful human nature. Great, we can do what we like then? No. The point is, we live a life which pleases God in response to his grace and love for us. There is a world of difference here. The law is like a single issue activist who bullies people into their way of thinking and is intolerant of those who disagree.

Luke 7: The picture and the story. Jesus at the house of Simon the Pharisee: Look at this extravagant response to the grace of God. She loved much because forgiven much. Surrounded by a group of well meaning people who have done well by the rules and enjoy a certain self satisfaction, she shows the truth of what Paul says to the Galatians: We are justified by faith in Christ and not by doing works of the law.

God gives us a model of fatherhood which is gracious and forgiving. These are needed in any relationship you care to name. Remember Philip Larkin? "They **** you up your mum and dad." Earthly fathers are not only not perfect, we are downright imperfect. How did we all survive? Well we do but there needs to be forgiveness as well. "I blame the parents" is OK but cannot absolve us from our own responsibility.

I'd like to turn Larkin's poem round and say they **** you up your children" I once had some correspondence with a number of parents whose lives had been ruined by their children. We should not be surprised that forgiveness is needed on both sides. This is what grace is all about.

At the heart of our relationship with God is grace which leads to forgiveness, reconciliation and freedom.

"She loved much because forgiven much" Amen.

Music

Open: God the father of creation
Worship songs: Open the eyes of my heart
How deep the father's love
I walk by faith

Gradual Only by grace Jesus Christ I think upon
your sacrifice

Offertory: I will offer up my life

Out: O lord my God when I in awesome wonder
Father I place into your hands