

A Family Welcome

This Sunday is Father's Day. A time to think about Dads- to give thanks for dads and the part they play or have played in our life. But perhaps it's not an easy day for some – those who can't see their dad at this time, or worse, their dad has passed away. It can also be not easy for those for whom the word 'Father' might have some negative associations because of bad experiences. Father's Day- a day of different feelings for different people.

When the bible talks of God the Father, we mustn't put our own view of 'Father' and paint it on to God. We mustn't make God in our image. For Jesus God the Father is the most delightful, reassuring and wonderful person.

This means when we think of God the Father we're not to put onto God any negative associations we might have of our own Father or anyone else we may think of. Think of the best human dad or anyone else; a person you most want to be with and at their best is a tiny picture of the kind of person that God the Father is; not saying God is like them but that the joy we get from some people is a taste of how delightful relating to our Heavenly Father is.

For some of us we need to re-associate the word Father when we think of God and see in the light of our heavenly father who is always good, kind, strong for us and there with us.

There lots about families in the bible. Jesus tells the story of one family- a dad and two sons. You can read about it in Luke 15.

Jesus tells the story - the youngest son takes his share of his inheritance early and goes off and parties hard, finds himself in a mess, finds himself in a really crummy job and decides to go home and work for his dad.

Luke 15:¹⁷ *"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.*

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹ *"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'*

²² *"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'* So they began to celebrate.

The son thinks "I'll come home as an employee" but his father will have none of it. He interrupts the son's prepared speech with celebration before he can talk of working for him. He will not have a slave, an employee, a worker- he will have a son. His child. And celebrates when his son comes home.

This is what our God is like - a welcoming, exuberant, lavish, loving God. Who longs for us to come to Him. Jesus tells this story to challenge some of the religious of His day that were

basically saying some people were beyond the pale and God couldn't possibly welcome and care for those sorts of people.

The Luke 15 story is a story of a welcoming and loving Dad. But it is really a story of how people view Dad - or really how people view how welcoming our heavenly Father is.

There is nobody in the world beyond the loving welcome of our Father God in Jesus. The heart of the Father when we come to him is never 'go away' but always 'welcome'. Jesus is always reminding us our heavenly Father is a 'welcome God' not a 'keep out god'.

At the heart of life is not a mean-spirited, cold hearted power mad celestial being, but the most loving Dad. Before He became King - before there was anything to rule- before He ruled creation the Father always loved His Son. God is Love. He does rule but it is a fatherly, loving rule. Family heart comes first. Always has, always will.

Belonging is all for God.

When we see the kind of anti-racist protests that are going on at the time that I am saying this 'word of encouragement' we must recognise that the Father has made everybody valuable, unique and special regardless of ethnicity, regardless of skin colour and background. And even if a person doesn't love Jesus, we are called to love people- and get along as best we can with all people. Everywhere.

Racism is so wrong because it means that we think a person is less than us in some way - something God never says.

John 3:16-17: For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

When it says 'the world' put your own name there- but also think on everyone, and anyone else. Locally, nationally, in every continent and place in the world.

Knowing our welcoming heavenly Father changes everything. It's what dads are meant to try to be like. We are all aware of our own shortcomings- whether dads or not. For some people there may be real regrets as parents, or as children. The best way to deal with feeling about the past, and the best way to make human relationships healthier now is to know we are loved by our heavenly Father. We love better when we know we are loved. In Christ we are adopted as a child- sons and daughters of our heavenly Father.

So on this Father's Day remember dads. We give thanks for good memories of dads; you may think of all who care and make a difference whether dad or someone else. We also recognise no one's perfect - but we should know we are loved by God. The perfect Parent- the loving God the Father, who with God the Son, and the Holy Spirit calls us to enjoy His family love.

This Father's Day and as you go into your future-spend time with your heavenly Father who loves you so much.

Amen.