

Jesus walked freely, lived freely and carried an intimate relationship with his Father, so that others could see what it looked like to be in communion with God.... the one who sent him into the world.

"As the father has loved me so I have loved you ...

The Fathers love is a gift and we are free to relate with it or not.

It is a greater love than you or I have ever known from our earthly fathers, mothers, spouses, brothers or sisters. It is a total and unconditional love that as we engage with it automatically makes us more like the one who gives it. In a world that constantly compares people, ranking them as more or less intelligent, more or less attractive, more or less successful, it is not easy to truly believe in a love that doesn't do the same. When we hear about someone who gets a promotion, or praise for something they have done it is difficult not to see ourselves as less worthy we cannot avoid asking ourselves "why not me...." In a world full of grades, scores and statistics we often measure ourselves against others, but God who is both father and mother does not compare any of his children...ever....

God does not have a celestial score board for anyone...ever.

The parodical son story is an image of how God patiently waits to be in communion with us and when we wander to a distant land, he waits again for us to return.

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus is unlike any other god that we read about, he is as Thomas Merton puts it: "Mercy, within mercy, within mercy".

When asked how much God loves us Jesus stretched one hand to the left and the other to the right and said "This much" and died

On this day when we honour our earthly fathers, let us also reflect and receive afresh the immense love that our Heavenly Father has for us and challenge ourselves as to how we respond to those who are still in a distant land as we once were....

For the love of God bids us to embrace them...clothe them and make them our honoured guests, not asking for excuses or explanations, but rather showing our joy that they are home at last.

Amen

St Mary's Sanderstead/ St James Riddlesdown

Father's Day 2019 Fr. Grant Cohen

When asked to explain Father's Day, said, a young lad said "It's just like Mother's Day, only you don't spend as much on the present."

I read some funny quotes about men which tickled me

When a man says "It will take too long to explain"
What he really means is "I have no idea how it works"

When a man says "That's interesting dear."
What he really means is "Are you still talking?"

When a man says "can I help with dinner"
What he really wants to say is "Why isn't it ready yet?"
When a man says "you know I could never love anyone else"
What he's really thinking is "I am used to the way you shout at me and realize it could be worse."

And finally, when a man says, "that's not what I meant."
What he really means is "If something I said can be interpreted two ways, and one of the ways makes you sad or angry, I meant the other one

Its Trinity Sunday today but it's also Father's Day and so I chose to use a different gospel reading because I want to share a few words about the father's love...

The parable is an allegory, since each member of the story contributes significantly to its meaning, in its original setting the father pictures God, the prodigal, the sinner who repents, the older brother the pharisees.

The real emphasis of the story is not on the sons, but on the father: Jesus wants us to see his Father's heart, a picture of love toward undeserving children.

This story represents two wayward sons. They were not slaves, there not servants, this is our story.

The Younger son says, "Father give me"

He gathers all he has and travels to distant country:
there he squanders his estate
He spends everything:
he finds himself in a famine and has nothing and also
that no one will give him anything.

The older brother does have some virtues which deserve respect, but he misses the qualities in his father's life.
His brother is a notorious sinner; he is righteous.

But he becomes angry:

he doesn't want to be involved in his brother's homecoming despite his father pleading with him:

I have been slaving for you he says and you never gave me anything.

This son of yours, not my brother ... your son!

has devoured your assets with prostitutes.

It is interesting that of the so called seven deadly sins, four are of the mind and spirit and three of the flesh. The younger indulges himself in lust, gluttony, and sloth. But it is the sins of the spirit: pride, covetousness, envy, and anger that take captive the elder brother.

And these are the most dangerous because in the end it's these that often cause us to be repelled by the sins of others and yet proud of our own. Both sons revolted against their father, the younger from parental control, the other from parental love. Each one wanted the same thing: to have their own way.

Father's Day is about honouring our Fathers even if we don't buy them as much as we do our mother's and I know that there isn't one father here who wouldn't lay down his own life for his children, but I wonder if we really, really know how much God loves us...

I read a story about triplets, 3 young boys who got along well. They saw everything alike. They were loyal to each other and if one got into trouble they wouldn't reveal who did it.

A neighbour once asked their dad "How in the world do you know which one to punish if there's trouble?"

He said, "It's easy. I just send all 3 of them to bed without their supper. And the next morning I punish the one with the black eye. Next week my nephew is leaving home and is coming to live with me Monday to Friday. He just turned 18 and is starting his first job in cyber security... which if you don't know is a legal computer hacker... His parents are really sad because they have a beautiful relationship, and his dad is one of the best and while Jacob is excited to come live with uncle Grant, his brothers are even more excited because one of them will get his ensuite bedroom and the other a bigger room than he currently has....but Jacob will miss his parents and his brothers because while I love him I'm not his dad....As much as we see the parable of the prodigal son being about the change in a person's life, the other side of this story is that of a father who never gives up hope that his son, his child would return and had already decided how he would act when that day came. For many of us we identify more with the God who wants to punish than to embrace, the God who is just looking for an excuse to look away, or to put us down. It is a fact that we live because of being touched by the love of our parents and others and that love is only a reflection of a greater love and there's no question that our relationship with family and others contributes to our feeling of being loved or not. Our sense of ourselves is enhanced by true love and diminished where love is imperfect.

Isn't it true that we have only been hurt because others were unable to reflect unconditional love to us?

Perhaps they held on to us too tightly or pushed us away. In many cases they wounded us not because they wanted to wound us but because they themselves had been wounded and had been loved imperfectly. The story reaches its climax when the younger brother realises what he must do..."I'll get up and go to my father..." He could have recognised his condition and never returned... You'll notice that he didn't say I will get up and change. Reformation is good, but it is not enough. He didn't say "I will get up and join the Church." Joining the Church is right and worthwhile, but joining the Church is not enough. He said, "I will get up and go to my father. I will never stop, until I come face to face with God."

There were once 3 fathers who each felt the soft hand of his child in his own hand & realized the responsibility of teaching his child about God.

One felt the awesome responsibility that was his, so he taught the child about the power & might of God.

As they walked down the pathway of life & came to the tall trees in the forest, he pointed to them & said, "God made them & God can cause them to come crashing down anytime He wants to." As they walked in the hot sun he said, "This is God's sun. He made it & He can cause it to be so hot & so intense that the plants in the field will wither & die." Again & again he hammered home the power of God & how the child must be obedient to God. Then one day they came face to face with God, & the child hid behind his father, afraid even to look, refusing to put his hand into the hand of God.

The second father also realized his responsibility to teach his child about God.

Hurriedly, he tried to teach all the important lessons he knew.

As they looked at the trees, they only stopped for a moment to gaze at them. As they looked at the flowers of the field they hurried on by. He told stories, but they were hurried & crammed together. He filled the child full of facts, but he never taught him how to live, or to love God. Finally, one day, at twilight they came face to face with God, but the child only gave God a casual glance & then turned away.

The third father felt the touch of a tender hand in his & adjusted his steps to the tiny steps of the child. They walked along, stopping to look at all of God's beauty & grandeur. They walked in the fields & picked the flowers. They felt the delicate petals & smelled their fragrance. They watched a bird in flight, & another building her nest & laying her eggs & sitting on them until they hatched. They watched all of the beauties of nature while the father told his child stories about God over & over again. Finally, one day in the twilight they saw the face of God, & without hesitation, the child placed his hand trustingly into the hand of His heavenly Father.

All of us irrespective of our experience of earthly love are invited to encounter and engage with the unconditional love of our heavenly father who longs to embrace us no matter what we have done and to tell us that we are loved beyond measure.

Our spiritual journey is nothing more than a return to intimacy with God that's all. And that's the message that Jesus came to share.... that perfect love casts out all fear'