

God as Father: Apostles Creed Sermon 2

“I believe in God, the Father the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth”

A sermon by Bob Mendelsohn
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Given at St Swithun’s Anglican Church, Pymble NSW
6 May 2007

Shalom! Thanks to Roger for another welcome to St Swithun’s and to the work of God you are doing here. I’m always pleased to return to a friendly pulpit.

Theology can be so boring. Not for the professionals, mind you, they get paid to think like academics. They enjoy looking at Greek texts and conjugating verbs. They read ancient documents and find pleasure like some of us do with sinking 30-foot putts or reading Grisham novels.

But theology is for the theologians, right? Just whisper *Summa Theologica* and his Pavlovian salivators engage. So when Roger asked me to preach on this segment of the Apostles’ Creed, the part about God being Father, Creator and Almighty...it made me wonder... do I really look like a theologian?

So I pondered it again and realized the creed is not only for theologians. It’s actually for all of us. In fact, although originally the short few statements of any of the three historic Christian creeds might have been written to keep certain heresies and certain heretics out, we are a long way from there and from then. Now we confess the creeds as a matter of form for some, to be sure, but for many of us, it’s a weekly reminder of our convictions. And it’s good to be

reminded of our convictions, in a world gone mad by negotiable convictions and whimsical commitments.

So as we consider God being Father, Almighty and Creator, for now, let us remind ourselves of His nature. We remind ourselves that as God is Father, he is the responsible one He is the authority. He is the progenitor of the race and of the planet. So many things.

When I think about God being such, it helps me be confident in His capacity today to take care of things. It gives me strength to carry on in a messed up world. I'm encouraged, aren't I?

So let's actually outline this notion of God as Father. Specifically can we seriously think on four aspects of God, as I see it. First Fatherhood implies authority. The father commands and disposes. This implies the initiative which he calls his Son to exercise in resolute obedience to the Father's will. Let me illustrate authority.

During the terrible days of the Blitz, a father, holding his small son by the hand, ran from a building that had been struck by a bomb. In the front yard was a shell hole. Seeking shelter as quickly as possible, the father jumped into the hole and held up his arms for his son to follow.

Terrified, yet hearing his father's voice telling him to jump, the boy replied, 'I can't see you!'

The father, looking up against the sky tinted red by the burning buildings, called to the silhouette of his son, 'But I can see you. Jump!'

The boy jumped, because he trusted his father.

The Christian faith enables us to face life or meet death, not because we can see, but with the certainty that we are seen; not that we know all the answers, but that we are known.

God is seen as the Father, the authority. [Not mentioned during the abbreviated sermon, but for online reference here is the notion of responsibility. When we talk about authority and rights, it's always right to remind ourselves of right use of authority. It's never right to abuse authority, to abuse others, but to remember that God is ever calling us to account.]

Second, Fatherhood implies affection. A small boy was consistently late coming home from school. His parents warned him one day that he must be home on time that afternoon or face the consequences, but nevertheless he arrived later than ever. His mother met him at the door and said nothing.

At dinner that night, the boy looked at his plate. There was a slice of bread and a glass of water. He looked at his father's full plate and then at his father, but his father remained silent. The boy was crushed and knew his parents' anger and what he had done to deserve it.

The father waited for the full impact to sink in, then quietly took the boy's plate and placed it in front of himself. He took his own plate of meat and potatoes, put it in front of the boy, and smiled at his son. When that boy grew to be a man, he said, 'All my life I've known what God is like by what my father did that night.' The affection of a Father, that's what the boy experienced and in which he lived.

Fatherhood teaches us about God's authority and affection. It also teaches us about fellowship. This is the desire of the Father to be in relationship with us, to know us, to be known by us.

There's a Spanish story of a father and son who had become estranged. The son ran away, and the father set off to find him. He searched for months to no avail. Finally, in a last desperate effort to find him, the father put an ad in a Madrid newspaper. The ad read: 'Dear Paco, meet me in

front of this newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven. I love you. Your Father."

On Saturday 800 Pacos showed up, looking for forgiveness and love from their fathers. [Bits & Pieces, October 15, 1992, p. 13]

The Hebrew word for 'Daddy' is abba and very much carries with it the personal, the crawl-up-on-the-lap tender moment with our Father. This is the relational aspect of fatherhood for which we all long, amen?

The fourth aspect of Fatherhood on which I want to speak is honour. Some would call it recognition. A couple quotes are worthy here. "Show me the man you honor and I will know what kind of man you are." -- Thomas Carlyle. Also Mark Twain said, "It is better to deserve honours and not have them than to have them and not deserve them." Of course, recognition can be confusing. After a morning church service, a father observed his young son in the back of the sanctuary looking at a plaque on the wall. When the father joined him, the youngster asked what the plaque was for. The father replied, 'Son, that was put up in the memory of all those who have died in the service.'

Turning to his father, he asked, 'Morning or evening service?'

Now all these four aspects of the relationship of Fatherhood to the planet, to the world, to Jesus, to us.. can we really draw comfort and encouragement from this almost clinical study?

Let's see how Jesus, or can I call him Y'shua, handled Fatherhood.

God wills to exalt his Son.

"All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. (Matthew 11.27)

and again

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28.18-20)

Here we see God's authority transferred to the Son. His affection is clear, the Son can will to reveal or not, He wants disciples, too. The fellowship is obvious, he wants relationship transferred and the Father has passed on honour to the Son.

All this extends to God's adopted children. In, through, and under Jesus Christ their Lord, they are ruled, loved, accompanied, and honored by their heavenly Father.

Jl Packer said, "As Jesus obeyed God, so must they (1 John 5:1, 3). As God loved his only-begotten Son, so he loves his adopted sons (John 16:27). As God had fellowship with Jesus, so he does with us (1 John 1:3). As God exalted Jesus, so he exalts Jesus' followers, as brothers and sisters in one family (John 12:32; 17:24).

In these terms the Bible teaches us to understand the shape and substance of the parent-child relationship which binds together the Father of Jesus and the servant of Jesus." [Your Father Loves You by James Packer, Harold Shaw Publishers, 1986, page for May 6]

But maybe you are thinking, Bob, this is well and truly a fine theological unpacking of the subject. But really, if you had three minutes with me after the service, you would say, this doesn't apply to you. What, I would say? Why not? And you would describe in as

much detail as you are comfortable sharing the broken relationship with your own father. You would tell me that the problem in hearing a sermon about God being Father and such is that you had such a bad one, you cannot even imagine God being recognizably different than that, unless of course, we use another term besides "Father."

Let me say to you, I understand.

I imagine a little girl of seven who has known only rejection and abuse from her father whom she loves dearly. At Sunday School she is taught that God is her heavenly Father. What is her perception of Him going to be? Based on her experience with her natural father, she will see God as an unstable, rejecting, abusing person she cannot trust.

Psychologists say that a child's basic personality and unique responsiveness to his environment are established in the first five years of life. The age of gender identity formation may occur even earlier. Should not the role of the father extend beyond the mere initiation of life when the sperm is furnished to fertilize an ovum?

US sociologist David Popenoe says that after 30 years of research, he knows of few issues in which the weight of evidence is so decisively on one side. "On the whole," he says, "for children, two-parent families are preferable to single-parent and step families."

Wade Horn, President of the National Fatherhood Initiative, agrees. If the authors can't find any "empirical support" for the value of fathers, he concludes, "it's because they aren't looking."

That body of evidence indicates that children raised in homes without fathers are more likely to commit crimes, abuse drugs, have

children out of wedlock, live in poverty, drop out of school, and commit suicide.

Boys who grow up without their fathers are at least twice as likely as other boys to end up in prison. Sixty percent of rapists and 72% of adolescent murderers never knew or lived with their fathers. And the issue is not one of class, race, or gender. For instance, affluent white girls raised without a father in the home are five times more likely to become mothers while still adolescents.

Scripture, history, and tradition support the overwhelming scientific evidence. We know the family--led by a mother and a father--is the God-given structure for child rearing. Substitute anything else, and we run the risk of serious problems.

Of course, intact traditional families have problems, too. But only someone blinded by a political agenda would not see that these two-parent homes are the best environment for children.

By God's grace, many godly single parents manage to overcome the challenges of solitary child rearing, and Christians must be ready to assist these families when they need help. And when we see so-called "family experts" making phony claims about expendable fathers, you and I must make sure our policy makers hear the truth: That human fathers, like our heavenly One, are irreplaceable.

[BreakPoint Commentary #91013 - 10/13/1999 (c) 1999 Prison Fellowship Ministries]

Fatherhood is about authority, and we who are earthly fathers need to speak into our children's lives as such. It's about affection and our children are desperate for our love. It's about fellowship and I know of no worse song out there than "Cat in the Cradle" by Harry

Chapin. He sings the haunting chorus, ""When you coming home, dad?" "I don't know when, But we'll get together then. You know we'll have a good time then." ...And as I hung up the phone, it occurred to me, He'd grown up just like me. My boy was just like me."

Let me focus on the cross with words from Oswald Chambers, whose words have been immortalized in the daily devotional "My Utmost for His Highest" which I've read each day for 30 years now. This reading from November 20.

Beware of the pleasant view of the Fatherhood of God – God is so kind and loving that of course He will forgive us. That sentiment has no place whatever in the New Testament. The only ground on which God can forgive us is the tremendous tragedy of the Cross of Christ; to put forgiveness on any other ground is unconscious blasphemy. The only ground on which God can forgive sin and reinstate us in His favour is through the Cross of Christ, and in no other way.

I suppose this section from our readings this morning sums up for me the loving, awesome role of God the Father. He created (and in a sense "fathered") the world. He "does not grow weary or tired. His understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. (Isaiah 40.28-31)

No greater picture is found for us in the Bible of this Father's love and attention than what is nicknamed the story of the Prodigal Son. If "prodigal" actually translates to "effusive" and "generous", then in the story it's the Father who is the Prodigal one. Some of you will know the story (found in Luke 15). There the younger son of a man

spits on his family's love, name and inheritance and wishes his father dead. The son takes his share of the inheritance and wastes it in prodigal living (now you get that word), spending even what he did not have, ending up in a pig's sty (so you know it's not a Jewish ending.) Whilst there he realizes he is not doing right and decides to go home.

When the father gets wind of the return of his son, even when the son was a 'long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him."

What love... what compassion...what forgiveness. With arms open wide, all the son had to do was to turn 1°, not even 180°. The father would see the change of heart and meet his son as early as possible.

And he will do so for you, if you will turn to him, even only 1°.

He loves us and wants us to be in relationship with him. Maybe you feel like a Paco this morning, out of touch with God, for many particular reasons. He is calling to you today. He wants to heal what was broken. You may be tired or weary; you may have fallen or stumbled. Will you return to Him today? Will you come back home?

Speak to one of the ministers or to me this morning, and let us share with you in this return. Let's pray together and ask God to re-welcome you with open arms.

www.jewsforjesus.org.au

End of sermon

Endnotes:

Read this wonderful testimonial from National Public Radio

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5016108>

At the Metropolitan Museum of Art

God the Father, lunette

Ambrogio Bevilacqua (Italian, Milanese, active by 1481, until at least 1512)

Oil on wood; Overall, including frame, 20 1/2 x 38 1/2 in. (52.1 x 97.8 cm)

Bequest of George Blumenthal, 1941 (41.190.40b)



From *Wikipedia!*

In the monotheistic Israelite religion, God is called the "Father" with a unique sense of familiarity. He also stands as the patriarchal law-giver, and the one who through covenant maintains a special father-child relationship with the people, giving them the Shabbat, stewardship of his oracles, and a unique heritage in the things of God, calling Israel "his first-born son". The Jewish God is also attributed the fatherly role of protector: he is called the Father of the poor, of the orphan and the widow, as their protector and guarantor of justice. He is also called the Father of the king, as a teacher and helper over the judge of Israel.

In Christianity, God is called "Father" in a previously unheard-of sense, besides being the creator and nurturer of creation, and the provider for his children, his people. The Father is said to have an eternal relation to his only Son, Jesus; which implies an exclusive and intimate familiarity that is of their very nature. In Christian theology, this is the revelation of a sense in which Fatherhood is inherent to God's nature, an eternal relationship.

To Christians, God the Father's relationship with humanity is as a father to children. Thus, humans in general are sometimes called children of God. To Christians, God the Father's relationship with humanity is that of Creator and created beings, and in that respect he is the father of all. The New Testament says, in this sense, that the very idea of family, wherever it appears, derives its name

from God the Father (Ephesians 3:15), and thus God himself is the model of the family.

However, there is a deeper sense in which Christians believe that they are made participants in the eternal relationship of Father and Son, through Jesus Christ. Christians call themselves adopted children of God: But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts crying out, "Abba, Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (Epistle to the Galatians 4:4-7)

Arthur Quiller-Couch, ed. 1919. *The Oxford Book of English Verse: 1250–1900*.
John Donne. 1573–1631

201. A Hymn to God the Father

WILT Thou forgive that sin where I begun,
Which was my sin, though it were done before?
Wilt Thou forgive that sin through which I run,
And do run still, though still I do deplore?
When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done; 5
For I have more.

Wilt Thou forgive that sin which I have won
Others to sin, and made my sins their door?
Wilt Thou forgive that sin which I did shun
A year or two, but wallow'd in a score? 10
When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done;
For I have more.

I have a sin of fear, that when I've spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;
But swear by Thyself that at my death Thy Son 15
Shall shine as He shines now and heretofore:
And having done that, Thou hast done;
I fear no more.



Picture:

Fra Bartolommeo. God the Father in Glory with St. Mary Magdalene and St. Catherine of Siena. 1509. Oil on wood. Pinacoteca, Lucca, Italy.

Quote:

"If you do not raise your eyes you will think you are at the highest point"
Antonio Porchia

RECOMMENDED READING

1. Floyd McClung, Jr., *The Father Heart of God*, (Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR 97402, 1985)
2. David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting our Most Urgent Social problem*, Basic Books, Harper Collins, 1995. An alarming, but excellent sociological study of the disappearance of fatherhood in the United States in our time.
3. Recent Article
Expendable You: Are Fathers Unnecessary?
by Charles Colson