

Father's Day 2020 - Psalm 139: 1-18; Luke 15.1-3,11b-32

Reflection 1 – I will arise and go to my father....

Regardless of the circumstances we come to this Father's Day with happy or sad experiences of our earthly Fathers – happy or sad experiences of being a Father – or whether we are happy or sad about those who have been fatherly to us or who have been like a father to us...

Whatever your circumstances, we are here together and the goodness in being in fellowship – is that in fellowship we are bonded together with the Holy Spirit who weaves God's unconditional love within us and through us and allows the sad and joyful experiences to mingle together and for the sad and the joyous to support each other in celebration and compassion.

In today's reading as we listened to the parable of the Prodigal Son, and it gives us the opportunity to think about God - our heavenly Father of all – and the themes that it evokes – unconditional love that demands from our hearts total forgiveness – total mercy and total compassion for someone's brokenness - a love that can then offer total joy and total hope and they are all amazingly powerful qualities of what it means to live out God's fatherly love on earth – as it is in heaven. And, of course, something that it totally impossible to do – but we can try, can't we?

At the beginning of the Book of Common Prayer Evening Service, the preface is those moving words said by the Prodigal Son, broken by the lure of the world and simply and completely lost – 'I will arise and go to my Father and say 'Father I have sinned against you and against Heaven and am no more worthy to be called thy Son...'

This young man isn't even expecting anything from his Father except the opportunity to earn his keep so that he can reclaim some dignity and have an opportunity to apply the lessons learnt as he spent out his spiritual blindness and ignorance that led him to make such demands on the Father he loved and to think that he was beyond any sort of redress. I imagine many people can identify with this type of scenario – leaving what you have in order to find more and discovering that you had it all in the first place. Just being home, safe with his father would be enough.

And sure enough, the Prodigal's loving Father waits patiently, lovingly and in silent hope – and when it's time welcomes back his son with arms open wide – no questions – just the most amazing celebration - unconditional love in action...

Forgiveness has been playing on my mind this week – reflecting back on times I have needed to ask forgiveness and times when I have had to forgive someone in the same way...

Can you remember a time when you have needed forgiveness for peace of mind – or have been asked to forgive? What did it feel like – to forgive – and to be forgiven...I don't know about you but the total relief is initially the same – and I think that is because forgiveness and forgiving are gifts of grace from the same Heavenly Father who forgives us our sins and then asks that we forgive those who sin against us...

Is there anyone you might have been holding in judgment – in your heart or on the ground – anyone that you could set free with your forgiveness in the name of our heavenly Father?

Is there anyone you might need to seek out to say sorry to and ask forgiveness – in your heart or on the ground?

God's 'Our Father' love is the most authentic love and freely available any time we turn back for it – and the only kind of love that is ever sustainable and unconditional – a gift of God to be received and to be used 'for-giving' onwards to someone else....

Let's use this Father's Day as a time to be grateful for the blessings of our lives across the board – and yes, even amidst this strange pandemic time – and to know that despite ourselves, God is always ready to welcome us home into his arms of forgiveness and unconditional love and to steer and guide us on our way. Amen

## Reflection 2 – Fatherly Love

Psalm 139:1-18

The inescapable God – the inescapable Love...

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.  
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.  
You search out my path and my lying down,  
and are acquainted with all my ways.  
Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O Lord, you know it completely.  
You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it

Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?  
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.  
If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast.  
If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
and the light around me become night',  
even the darkness is not dark to you;  
the night is as bright as the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.

For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
that I know very well.  
My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.  
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.  
In your book were written  
all the days that were formed for me,  
when none of them as yet existed.  
How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them!  
I try to count them—they are more than the sand;  
I come to the end—I am still with you.

Regardless of any earthly circumstances, today on this Father's Day we are reminded in the words of Psalm 139 that above all else, we are children of a heavenly Father. Abba, Father – that intimate endearment for that intimate loving presence of God our heavenly Father who has known us in all ways us from as far back as the beginning of all things – way before we even knew of our own existence...

We have the words in front of us – take a moment to look at the essence of this psalm...

And imagine for a moment if you will – that this loving parent wants nothing for us other than to trust him, believe in him and to receive his love today – just as we are – through Jesus his own Son, who is his go between, so that we his children on earth can draw closer to our Father in heaven – and so receive more deeply his love and his strength and his comfort and his hope that we might find peace and harmony on our earthly journey, regardless of our struggles and strives, and roles we are being called to play out in our families, our communities and in our world....

And as a way into our Psalm, I invite you now to perhaps close your eyes and listen if you will - to a letter that our heavenly Father might want to write to us through these words so that we can hear from him just how much we are loved and cherished – just like the Prodigal Son was loved and cherished...

So here is God's Psalm 139 love letter - to you....

"My child, you may not know me, but I know everything about you. I know when you sit down and when you rise up. I'm familiar with all your ways. Even the very hairs on your head are numbered. For you were made in my image. In me you live and move and have your being; for you are my offspring.

I knew you even before you were conceived. I chose you when I planned creation – you were not a mistake.... For all your days are written in my book. I determine the exact time of your birth and where you would live. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. I knit you together in your mother's womb and brought you forth on the day you were born.

I have been misrepresented by those who don't know me. I am not distant and angry but I am the complete expression of love and it is my desire to lavish my love on you, simply because you are my child and I am your heavenly father.

I offer you more than an earthly father ever could, for I am the perfect father. Every good gift that you receive comes from my hand, for I am your provider and I meet all your needs.

My plan for your future is always filled with hope because I love you with an everlasting love.

My thoughts towards you are countless as sands on the seashore and I rejoice over you with singing. I will never stop doing good to you for you are my treasured possession.

I desire to establish you with all my desire and with all my heart and all my soul and I want to show you great and marvellous things. If you seek me with all your heart you will find me. Delight in me and I will give you the desires of your heart for it is I who gave you those desires.

I am able to do more for you than you could possibly imagine for I am your greatest encourager. I am also the father who comforts you in all your troubles. When you are broken-hearted, I am close to you. As a shepherd carries a lamb, I have carried you close to my heart.

One day, I will wipe away every tear from your eyes and I will take away all the pain you have suffered on this earth.

I am your father, and I love you even as I love my son, Jesus, for in Jesus, my love for you is revealed.

He is the exact representation of my being. He came to demonstrate that I am for you, not against you, and to tell you that I am not counting your sins. Jesus died so that you and I could be reconciled. His death was my ultimate expression of my love for you.

I gave up everything I loved so that I might gain your love and if you open and receive the gift of my son, Jesus, then you receive me, and nothing will ever separate you from my love again.

Come home and I will throw the biggest party heaven has ever seen! I have always been father and will always be father – your Father...

My question is, will you, my child – be my child? I am waiting for you...

Love, your heavenly father, Almighty God.....

So on this Father's Day – I pray that we may we all know that above all the earthly trimmings and titles, our Heavenly Father is loving us beyond measure and will hold us close and will love us with an everlasting love. I don't know about you, but I know what I will do in the hope of that promise – 'I will arise and go to my Father....' Amen

Revd Jacqueline Drake-Smith

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