

Things change as time passes. On this Father's Day, I want us to see how the image and role of fathers have also changed over the years. And I want to share with you something I got off of a website called "ahajokes.com" on internet. This funny webpage has many clean jokes and this is one of them that I found interesting. The title of this particular one is "Fathers Then and Now." It says "Fathers of year 1900 didn't have it nearly as good as fathers of today; but they did have a few advantages:"

In 1900, a father waited for the doctor to tell him when the baby arrived. Today, a father must wear a smock, know how to breathe, and make sure film is in the video camera.

In 1900, fathers could count on children to join the family business. Today, fathers pray their kids will soon come home from college long enough to teach them how to work the computer and set the VCR.

In 1900, a father came home from work to find his wife and children at the supper table. Today, a father comes home to a note: "Jimmy's at baseball, Cindy's at gymnastics, I'm at adult-Ed, Pizza in fridge."

In 1900, fathers and sons would have heart-to-heart conversations while fishing in a stream. Today, fathers pluck the headphones off their sons' ears and shout, "WHEN YOU HAVE A MINUTE.." (<http://www.ahajokes.com/par003.html>)

Surely, things have changed just like everything else. We live in a different world from 100 years ago. But no matter how much change there has been, there is one thing that does not change: that is the love of fathers for their children. Maybe there may be differences between mothers and fathers in the way they express their love; and different cultures have different ways of doing it; but fatherly love is a universal thing; it is a God given nature in every culture.

Personally I did not know what a father's love was when I was growing up because my father died when I was two years of age. I remember those childhood moments when I was very jealous of other

kids who had their own fathers. It was a just terrible feeling that you did not have someone you call "Dad." I think that is one of the most unfortunate things that could happen to a kid. No wonder the Bible always compares people in need to "the fatherless."

To me, the fact that I did not have a father caused traumatic damage to my personality; I did not like people; I was not proud of my family; I did not want to talk about my family and I was never a happy child. There was always a big dark spot in me.

And it was when I met Jesus in my college years that I became who I am; when I met Jesus, I felt the love of God; and that was when I felt worthy for the first time. When I became born again, it was very real to me that I was something. I felt I was important. To me, God's love was not something you talk about in theory; it was not something abstract; rather it was a real thing; I sensed I had a father with me; to me it was for the first time; it was so good.

I know there are feminist theologians out there who are very against the term "God as father." But to me, it is my experience; it is where I came from; it is where I stand. God is my father. He is the one who made me who I am; He is the one I trust; He is the one I want to look for when I need Him.

I have found peace in God and I am happy to be who I am.

Having said that, today's first lesson from Romans is very telling to me. "Therefore, since we are justified by faith," St. Paul says, "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul goes on to say, "While we were still weak, Christ died for us."

The reason why we have peace with God,
the reason why we can call God our father without any hesitation,
the reason why we have found peace with Him,
the reason why we can come to Him any time we want

is not because of what we did or who we are;

it is because of what God did through his Son Jesus;
it is because God let him die for us.

We call it grace. Grace means a gift. The gift is something that is given to you for nothing; you don't pay for it; if you have to pay for it, it is not a gift anymore; if it is a gift, you get it for free. If there is one thing you ever want to do about it, you say "thank you."

And the best way of saying thank you to God's love is getting involved in missions. Getting involved in missions means being a part of what Jesus told us to do.

In Matthew's Gospel for today, Jesus is doing two things: teaching and healing. He goes about all the cities and villages talking about the gospel of the kingdom and healing every kind of disease and sickness. And he is sending out his disciples telling them to do the same.

The main verse is 36: Jesus had compassion for the people he met. The word compassion is a translation of a Greek word which literally means "bowels." So the word means that Jesus had terrible pains deep in his body when he saw people. It did not really matter whether they were rich and highly educated; everyone looked fatherless; everyone was heavy-laden; everyone had problems; everyone was dealing with their own life struggles; Jesus saw what everyone was going through in their lives.

Jesus felt the same pains as they did deep in their hearts and bodies. Jesus had fatherly love for them. Jesus had mercy on them and he healed them.

One thing that bothered me was verse 5 of Matthew chapter 10 which says: "Do not go into the way of Gentiles, and don't go to any city of Samaritans. But just go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Does that mean Jesus only cared for the people of Israel? Does that

mean that Matthew thought non-Jewish people had not deserved the Gospel? Why only the people in Israel? I was kind of puzzled by this.

To answer this question, we have to read the whole book of Matthew. If you see chapter 28 verses 19, Jesus says "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."

This means that Matthew's Gospel is for all people, not just the Jews.

Then, why does verse 5 say what it says? Why only Jews?

One answer is that God has not given up on Israel! Israel is a mission field, maybe a special one that needs more attention, contrary to expectation of many people. To Matthew, Israelites were much harder than others to reach out. Even though they think they are God's chosen people, Matthew thinks, they were the very people his church had to teach about the Gospel.

To God, all are his people, Jews and non-Jews. Everyone needs to know that they are loved by God.

But the bottom line is everyone has to respond to the command God is giving through Jesus Christ.

And here comes his command to his disciples and us as a church: Go and preach saying "The kingdom of God is at hand. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons; freely you received, freely give."

Certainly not everyone can preach. But we can share the love of God with others in our own ways.

Certainly not everyone cure the sick. But we can have compassion; we can show our support to those who are suffering in many different ways.

Certainly none of us can raise the dead. But we can give uplifting encouragement to those who are spiritually and mentally distressed.

Certainly not everyone can cast out demons. But we can join others in fighting for justice and peace; there are demons and evil spirits more than ever which mislead people in this country to oppress God's people throughout the world.

The bottom line is that God gave us grace to call Him our Father. And the Father loves all people, regardless of who they are. The world needs to realize this love more than ever before.

But the God who gave us this privilege is also asking us to respond to a call—the call to mission.

And the mission is to make this world a better place not only for us only but for all God's people.

On this Father's Day, let's remember such Father's love for us all. And let's make our efforts to respond to it.

Amen.