

“Whatever Happened to God the Father?”

Scripture: Mark 14:32-36

Gary:

It seems appropriate on Father's Day to talk about a question I raised after men's circle a few weeks ago.

The question is: “Whatever happened to God the Father?”

Now, any conception of God is going to be metaphorical, and the Father was the dominant metaphor in Christendom right from AD 30 until about a quarter of a century ago.

And I was struck during children's time on Trinity Sunday a couple of weeks ago, when the kids had no trouble naming two out of the three – Jesus and the Holy Spirit – but drew a total blank on the third.

And I noticed that when Lloyd filled them in with God the Father, he hastily added, God the Creator.

I recognize that we may have gained something in terms of inclusiveness by dropping the patriarchal aspect of the metaphor, but maybe one Sunday of the year we might reflect on what we might be overlooking?

Lloyd: The two scripture passages we chose for this Sunday as we celebrate Baptism, Confirmation and Father's Day have God being referred to as “Abba, Father”. “Abba” is Father in the Aramaic language, and also can be translated “Daddy”.

In the text from Mark's gospel Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane.

This text is read in the church on Palm/Passion Sunday as we begin Holy Week. Jesus is facing his upcoming passion and death and as he grapples with his suffering he prays to God, his Father – “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.”

In the intimacy of prayer, at a time of suffering, Jesus addresses God as Abba, Father.

Daddy, you have power, with you nothing is impossible, I ask that you remove this cup of suffering from me, but not my will but yours be done.

“Daddy” – the word brings to mind protector, safety, one who can change situations, affect outcomes, use his power to bring relief to suffering.

Prayer is an intimate language and using Abba, Daddy, to address God is an intimate title. The language reflects a close relationship.

Gary: When you're walking through the woods in Springtime, is there a difference if the old hymn that springs to mind goes: "This is God's wondrous world", instead of "This is My Father's World"?

How does that abstraction, this move away from the personal, affect what we might call our theological stance? Because if you feel a connection with God the Father, there's a reciprocal sense of regard and responsibility. This doesn't exist if you're conceptualizing God as the Absentee Landlord, or God the Absolute Creative Force of the Universe, or whatever. God the Mother just doesn't seem to have caught on.

Lloyd:

I know for me that referring to God as Father has never been the most important way for me to image or speak of God.

I am aware that the Church for much of its history has been a patriarchal institution – men have had the power, women haven't; and the use of patriarchal language for God such as Father has played a part in this. Can we return to language that speaks of God as Father or does it carry too many negative connotations?

The metaphor God, the Mother doesn't work for me either.

I find power in thinking of the first person of the Trinity as God the Creator – Holy Other revealed in Creation. God is the Creator we are God's Creation, it doesn't get much more intimate than that.

I also find this relational intimacy in understanding God as revealed in Jesus Christ, the one who walks with me and talks with me; and the relational intimacy of God as Holy Spirit – breath, wind, "nearer than breathing, closer than hands and feet."

In my public and private prayers I don't refer to God as Father. But every Sunday together in worship we pray the prayer Jesus has taught us – the "Our Father", the Lord's Prayer.

I'm not sure anything has been lost in moving away from talking about God as Father.

For me the question is how do we deepen our understanding of God? What language helps us deepen our relationship with God and what language hinders us?

We certainly are aware that picturing God as a fatherly figure with a grey beard up in the sky waiting to punish us for our misdeeds is not a helpful or faithful way to picture God.

Gary:.....

Lloyd: The Trinitarian formula: “God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit” continues to be used by our Ecumenical partners, and when the United Church of Canada was reflecting on new Trinitarian language to use at Baptism we did not go down that path as it would have caused division with our ecumenical partners. So we still use the formula “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

In my sermon on Trinity Sunday I quoted from our United Church of Canada Song of Faith which says:

“With the church through the ages,
We speak of God as one and triune.
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
We also speak of God as
Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,
God, Christ and Spirit,
Mother, Friend and Comforter.
Source of Life, Living Word and Bond of Love,
And in other ways that speak faithfully of
The one on whom our hearts rely,
The fully shared life at the heart of the universe.
We witness to Holy Mystery that is Wholly Love.”

Gary: Amen..

Hymn: 635 “All The Way My Saviour Leads Me”
Prayers of the People