

A Tale of Two Fathers

Romans 5:12-15

Sin entered the world through one man, Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come. The gift of righteousness came by the one man, Jesus Christ. For as in Adam all die, so all in Christ will be made alive.

Father's Day was first observed on June 19, 1910 in Spokane, Washington. Sonora Smart Dodd proposed the idea in 1909 after she had attended a Mother's Day service. She wanted to honor her father, William Smart, who had raised six children on his own after his wife died in childbirth. President Calvin Coolidge supported the idea of a national Father's Day in 1924, but it took until 1966 for it to be observed. In that year President Lyndon Johnson declared the third Sunday of June to be Father's Day. Today Canada and the United Kingdom join the United States in observing Father's Day on the third Sunday of June. We do so today as we consider A Tale of Two Fathers.

The first father we consider is the first father of us all. The Holy Scripture records the counsel of God in the beginning: "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness." [So] the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it." And God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. This is the account of the creation of mankind and the charge given to Adam and Eve, namely to "be fruitful and increase in number." Therefore, all by virtue of a shared humanity, claim Adam and Eve as their first parents. Their life was good, back in the beginning. God planted a garden in Eden, and there he put the couple he had formed. God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. Adam and Eve simply had to tend the garden and take care of it. To our technology-driven lifestyles it may sound boring and simplistic, but I'm guessing they were captivated by their surroundings and completely content in their task. Some might call it...paradise.

Unfortunately it was not a permanent paradise. Long before Sonora Dodd proposed Father's Day, even before Adam and Eve became our first parents in fulfillment of "be fruitful and multiply," paradise was broken. God's command seemed innocent enough: "Eat from any tree in the garden, but not from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Why, there were many trees in the garden pleasing to the eye and good for food. More than we could possibly need or want. The restriction of one tree: a small thing for God to ask, and for human beings to obey. It did include the troubling word: "When you eat of it you will surely die." Being unfamiliar with death and content with life from the breath of God, Adam and Eve were untested and unprepared for the temptation placed before them. The temptation was subtle, it included half truth, and appeared desirable. This is a teaching moment for all of us. Be wary of wolves that come in sheep's clothing. The very nature of temptation is desire. Be confident that what you desire is God pleasing. If so, well and good. But if the Spirit of God cautions against such desire, yield to the Spirit and decline the desire. If Adam and Eve had so yielded and not eaten of the tree, this world would look entirely different than it does today.

But that was not the case. Adam and Even believed Satan over God, ate of the forbidden fruit, and brought sin into paradise. And along with sin brought death. Saint Paul interprets: "Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned." A devastating consequence. One that plays itself out in every generation. Disobedience, rebellion, hatred, greed, and death. A whole new reality. But not what we would call "paradise." Adam and Even are expelled from the garden, must now till ground that is cursed with painful labor, must anticipate great pain in childbirth, and expect to return to dust when death concludes life. Into such conditions Adam and Eve give birth to children, first Cain and Abel, later Seth after Cain murdered Abel, ultimately all the way to you and me.

God made Adam and Eve in his image. Scripture records: "Adam had a son in his image and he named him Seth." The image of God was broken by sin and replaced by the spoiled image of sinful Adam. That is our image. And our inheritance from our first father? Death. Hardly "Happy

Father's Day", father Adam.

But this is a Tale of Two Fathers. For father Adam does not have the last word. St. Paul hints at a later word when he says, "Adam was a pattern of the one to come." The second father is God, our heavenly Father. And he would not rest as long as death reigned. "As a father has compassion on his children," declares the psalmist, "so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust."

This compassion moves him to reverse the Genesis curse. Already in the Garden of Eden he curses the devil and prophesies of his downfall by the offspring of the woman. But what offspring would this be? And by what means would the devil's downfall happen? It was "the one to come", of whom Adam was the pattern. The pattern of the one to the many. Adam, the one, brought sin and death to the many. God, our heavenly Father, would undo death by his second and greater Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus, the greater One, brought God's grace and righteousness to the many. Jesus would not set aside the Genesis curse. He would fulfill it in himself. The reign of death found a different subject. Jesus assumed this role in our place when he was nailed to the cross. The sins of the many became the sin of the One. Jesus became the representative man upon whom the curse was spoken. Our painful toil became his way of sorrows. Our sweat became great drops of blood on his brow. Our Genesis curse became his painful death, as he drank the cup of suffering and gave up his life for a world hell bent on destruction.

God, our heavenly Father, through his One and only Son, would have many sons and daughters. If the many died by the trespass of the one man, Adam, how much more does God's grace that came by the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! His sacrifice was sufficient and his grace is abundant. His righteousness that comes through the forgiveness of sins he offers freely to you and me and all who would believe in Jesus. Our inheritance which once was death has now become eternal life and salvation in his Name. And this does make for a Happy Father's Day. And a happy people on God's day.

It is the compassion of God, our heavenly Father, that informs fatherhood in our day. For to

have compassion on our children is to model the love of God who has compassion on his children.

We remember our fathers today and honor the role that God has given to fathers to "bring [children] up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." This role is a picture of God our heavenly Father who has loved us with an everlasting love and sent his one and only Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. If your father is living, tell him today that you love him. If he has gone to heaven, thank God for his role in making you the person you are today. Amen.

Philip Tesch
June 18, 2017
North Highlands, California