# Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost 6 Sep 2015

Proverbs 22
Psalm 125
James 2: 1-17
Mark 7:24-37

Proper 18B/Ordinary 23B/Pentecost 15 September 6, 2015 Textweek

The Old Testament, psalm and New Testament readings all provide an opportunity for reflection with a common thread;
"*9 Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor.*"
"*4 Do good, O Lord, to those who are good: to those that are upright in heart.*"
"*15 If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? 17 So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.*"

However, do we really want to hear another sermon on 'giving', or another sermon on 'doing'?

Image of Drowned Syrian, Aylan Kurdi, 3, Brings Migrant Crisis Into Focus
New York Times

> "Even if you give me all the countries in the world, I don't want them. What was precious is gone."

As its father's day we'll take the opportunity to look at the symbol of 'father' within the context of our faith; and also at the gospel which today has two quite distinct miracles of healing within the same narrative journey.

Father's day is designed to focus us and encourage us to celebrate the role of 'father' in our lives; and 99% of the promotional material directs us toward a simplistic stereotype of 'father'.
A quick browse through the papers and they are full of hardware store specials, discounted tools, unnecessary car accessories, sporting videos and books, BBQ specials and of course every bottle shop has advertised a father's day beer special.

The concept, the reality and the symbolic meaning of 'father' is much richer and deeper than the one-dimensional construct normalised by the advertising industry; and when we explore this depth and breadth we encounter many realities that open us to a broader appreciation;

We encounter the single mums and the same-sex couples who bring a whole new gender-free appreciation of the energy that is ‘being a father’.
We encounter step-fathers, God-fathers, foster fathers and dads in blended families that bring a richness that is free of genetic or ancestral lineage.
We encounter holy fathers, popes, priests and religious with the title of ‘father’ who give us an appreciation of ‘father’ beyond family and into the community aspects of ‘fatherhood’.
Then there are the geographical locations of ‘fatherland’, representing the nation of one's "fathers", "forefathers" or "patriarchs".; and introducing a clan-like or a nationalistic ideal and national identity associated with ‘father’.
Another useful reflection is to consider the significant individuals that have the title of father thrust upon them; Galileo Galilei has been called 'the Father of Modern Science' by modern-day scientists, and perhaps invites us to consider our own significance.

And of course we can also reflect on the divine aspect of ‘father’ as expressed in the Scriptures; it is a somewhat inflated image that has too often denied the balancing aspect of mother.
Many still ‘read’ the icon of God the Father as a literal reality, however, like earthly fathers it is richer and deeper when seen as an aspect of being, a part of each wholeness and not the wholeness itself.

Each of us, and everyone can reflect on and encounter an energy of father and fathering, and for many that energy will be a two-edged sword, the same applies of mother and mothering and in comparing one with the other we begin to identify some complimentary and some competing energies.
Now seek to bring the same process into our understanding of God, if we can free ourselves from a childish encounter with God, we know we are looking through the icon of father into a more whole reality; perhaps that’s why the ‘Trinity’ of Father, Son and Holy Spirit became so attractive, it was a step beyond the childish literal ‘father-god’ into a more whole Divine reality.
Sadly it still left out the balancing quality of the iconic mother, but it is a step toward a more whole and more universal understanding.

We learn much also about ‘father’, the parent by looking at the child; and that takes us into the gospel narratives where we explore the revelations of Christ.
However, if we begin with that same childish encounter and see Jesus only as ‘son of God’ then again we miss the depth and richness of what is being revealed, we leave the insights wrapped in a manger.

Rather than confined into 'Son of God' Jesus represents the reality of every child, for every child, given the chance, becomes in their own right the father and mother of the tomorrows that are their creation.

Rather than confined into 'Son of God' Jesus is the same wholeness that is God – "I and the Father are one".

In today's gospel we read of a journey, and so of a movement, "*Jesus set out and went away to the region of Tyre*". As part of that journey he sought to be alone and to pause, "*He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there*".
And he discovers one of life's truths, alone is not a reality; "*Yet he could not escape notice*".

Then in verse 27 we find the 'typical father figure' concerned for feeding the children, it is actually the typical mother figure but was written by men, still it illustrates that both are present in these gospel stories.

Verse 27; "*He said to her, "Let the children be fed first*"

The woman who confronts Jesus, who invades his seclusion, was a Gentile, of Syrophoenician origin, and perhaps here we have the balancing iconic mother, for when the two engage in dialogue, the wholeness, the healing of Jesus breaks from its self-imposed seclusion and accomplishes life; "*he said to her, "For saying that, you may go--the demon has left your daughter.""*

Perhaps we too think we are doing our bit by feeding our children, by looking after our own, but another voice is asking more, and there is more that can break free from our wholeness.

Returning now from this realisation, and going out from the house he had previously sought for himself; "*he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee*".

And the next 'movement into wholeness' is brought to him, rather than comes to him:
"*They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him.*"
The description of being unable to hear and not able to clearly express, is not a description of our government but of the man 'brought to' Jesus; or is it both?

And the details of the healing, the bringing into wholeness are symbolically significant.

"*He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. 34 Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened.""*

*"in private, away from the crowd";* speaks of an attentive intimacy
*"put his fingers into his ears",* speaks of an entering into the other, a giving oneself into another without any hint of sexual connotation.
*"he spat and touched his tongue'* actions of the mouth, but actions rather than words
And finally with a divine reference point he utters the unlocking of wholeness;
*"Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened."*

Here in the father's day gospel, we have a narrative for humanity, the Son is the Father.

*Be Opened*