

“Parental Gifts”

“Robert Lewis in his book “Real Family Values” tells a fascinating story about a remarkable, heartwarming discovery workers at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, Ohio, made in the winter of 1993.

While renovating a section of the museum, they found a photograph that had been hidden in a crevice underneath a display case. The man in the picture had a bat resting on his shoulder; he was wearing a uniform with the words ‘Sinclair Oil’ printed across his chest; his demeanor was gentle and friendly.

Stapled to the picture was a note, scribbled in pen by an adoring fan. The note read: ‘You were never too tired to play ball. On your days off, you helped build the Little League Field. You always came to watch me play. You were a Hall of Fame Dad. I wish I could share this moment with you. – Your Son, Pete.’” (From “Real Family Values” by Robert Lewis as reported by sermons.com)

Pete gave his father the gift of being honored in the Baseball Hall of Fame. That certainly helped to form a closer bond between the father and son. Flipping that example, on this Father’s Day and Heritage Sunday in this Historic Original Sanctuary for Round Grove United Church, we will consider the importance of gifts from instead of to our human and Divine Parents and from our forefathers and foremothers. Perhaps the most important of those gifts for us, for all who came before us, and for all who will come after us are God’s Own Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. The relationship between those two crucial gifts and our Divine Parent is the heart of the theological concept of the Trinity. Which is quite an appropriate subject for us today because today is also Liturgically referred to as Trinity Sunday.

Jesus sought to clarify his relationship with the Divine Parent and the Holy Spirit for his Original Disciples and for all of his followers – then and into the future – in our Reading from the Gospel of John, Jesus told his disciples on the night before his arrest in verses 13, 14b-15, *“When, however, the Spirit comes, who reveals the Truth about God, he will lead you into all the Truth. He will not speak on his own authority, but he will speak of what he hears and will tell you of things to come. ... he will take what I say and tell it to you. All that my Father has is mine; that is why I said that the Spirit will take what I give him and tell it to you.”*

So, the Holy Spirit has come to all of us as a Gift from God to lead us “into all the truth” and to communicate to us Jesus’ Message. Of course, God’s Son came to us, also, as a Special Gift from the Divine Parent. The Truth about God is our Divine Parent has given to us Agape Love, Undeserved Forgiveness – Grace, and an Invitation – Welcome into a New Faith Relationship with our Creator – Divine Parent, as well as, the New Life in Christ – the Life of God’s Kingdom.

David E. Leininger encourages us to, “Think of a four-year-old coming home one Sunday after a lesson that taught about God as our Heavenly Father. Sound theology would quickly note that God is neither male nor female, but youngsters do not concern themselves with theological niceties. A four-year-old hears ‘Father;’ the only father he knows anything about is the one that lives with him and says, ‘Pass the biscuits, please;’ so he asks ... ‘Is God like Daddy?’” Leininger observed, “Wow! What a heavy load! But a good load to consider on Fathers’ Day ... and a good one to consider when we realize that what Daddy is can become a role model for our children’s concept of God.” (David E. Leininger, Collected Sermons, www.Sermons.com)

The Apostle Paul helped flesh out the Gift Giving Example of our Daddy/Mommy God and of the Gifts our parents have Given us in our Scripture from his Letter to the Romans. He wrote in verses 1-2, and 5b, *“Now that we have been put right with God through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. He has brought us by faith into this experience of God’s Grace, in which we now live. And so, we boast of the hope we have of sharing God’s Glory! ... God has poured out His Love into our hearts by means of the Holy Spirit, who is God’s Gift to us.”*

The Gift Giving Example of our Divine Parent, which Paul described, is worthy of parental reduplication. The Gifts our Father and Mothers have given us have greatly enriched our lives and have provided us valuable examples for our own lives, faith, relationships, families, and societies. Such as, a story told by Rev. Richard

Fairchild years ago in the Christian Reader. “It was called ‘Priceless Scribbles.’ It concerns a father who touched his child’s life in an unexpected way. A young boy watched as his father walked into the living room. The boy noticed that his younger brother, John, began to cower slightly as his father entered. The older boy sensed that John had done something wrong. Then he saw from a distance what his brother had done. The younger boy had opened his father’s brand new hymnal and scribbled all over the first page with a pen.

Staring at their father fearfully, both brothers waited for John’s punishment. Their father picked up his prized hymnal, looked at it carefully and then sat down, without saying a word. Books were precious to him; he was a minister with several academic degrees. For him, books were knowledge. What he did next was remarkable, says the author of this story. Instead of punishing his brother, instead of scolding, or yelling, his father took the pen from the little boy’s hand, and then wrote in the book himself, alongside the scribbles that John had made. Here is what that father wrote: ‘John’s work, 1959, age 2. How many times have I looked into your beautiful face and into your warm, alert eyes looking up at me and thanked God for the one who has now scribbled in my new hymnal. You have made the book sacred, as have your brother and sister to so much of my life.’

‘Wow,’ thought the older brother, ‘This is punishment?’ The author of the story, now an adult, goes on to say how that hymnal became a treasured family possession, how it was tangible proof that their parents loved them, how it taught the lesson that what really matters is people, not objects; patience, not judgment; love, not anger.’ (Richard Fairchild, adapted by King Duncan)

Not only are we given the examples of the Gifts given to us by our Divine Parent and Parents, we also have the examples of the Gifts given to us by our forefathers and foremothers of Round Grove United Church. With this also being our Heritage Sunday Celebration, we will remember some of our Heritage by recalling what has been written in the 75th Anniversary History of this congregation. I quote, “(German Evangelical Friedens [Peace] Congregation) near Lewisville, under the leadership of the Rev. Theo. Tanner, was formally organized in the year 1901, with William Barfknecht, Fred Wolters, Sr., and Carl Uecker as officers. At the organizational meeting it was decided:

1. To build a church during the year 1901.
2. That the President was to buy two acres of land within three months on which to build the church.
3. That the minister (Rev. Tanner), who lived in Dallas, was to preach at least twelve times a year.
4. His salary would be \$100 a year.

Seven months later the church was completed. Henry Uecker, Sr., gave two acres of land on which to build the church and locate the cemetery.” The founders resisted the militarism and the poverty of their homeland. They also immigrated to this area with a bold commitment to remain faithful to their Relationship with God through Jesus Christ. They recognized staying obedient to the call of Jesus in this new land would be greatly aided by founding and participating in a local congregation of their denominational background. They had been members of the Evangelical Church in Germany. The Evangelical Church was created by the royal edict of King Frederick Wilhelm III of Prussia when he declared there would no longer be Reformed Churches or Lutheran Churches in his realm, instead, they would be united and called the Evangelical Church. Their faithfulness to the Good News of Jesus Christ, their seeking after Christian Unity, and their commitment to following God’s and Jesus’ Examples of giving the Gifts of Undeserved Forgiveness – Grace, Agape Love, and Hospitality – Invitation and Welcome are bedrock for the approach of Round Grove United Church, United Church of Christ.

So, on this Father’s Day and Heritage Sunday, we give great thanksgiving for the Parental Gifts from our Divine Parent, the Founders and foreparents of Round Grove United Church, and our own parents. Let us be committed to sharing those same Parental Gifts with our children, the children of our congregation, the children of this community, the children of our nation and of our world. Let us share our Divine Parent’s Undeserved Forgiveness – Grace, Agape Love, Invitation and Welcome, and New Life in Christ with all of God’s Children – All People! Amen.