

“Fearfully and Wonderfully Made”

Rev. Brian McCreanor – Vista La Mesa Christian Church – June 21, 2020

Genesis 1.27—“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Intentionally leaving the masculine his/he pronouns for God instead of replacing them with [God]. Maybe this influences your thoughts about the topic, maybe not.)

Psalms 139.13-14—“For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

Galatians 3.28—“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Scholars point out that it is likely intentional that Paul used “and” not “or” between male and female while using “or” between Jew or Greek and slave or free.)

When Rebecca first inquired whether or not I would be interested in participating in a dialogue sermon on healthy and holy masculinity for Fathers’ Day, it made me immediately try and define masculinity. In the year 2020, considering the evolution of the discussion of gender and my own journey for inclusion and dignity for all God’s children, it quickly became apparent to me personally that any attempt to define masculinity for Fathers’ Day or for any other reason was a fool’s errand informed only by my own limitations from my own life experiences.

In our house, we love baseball and love baseball movies. We love “Sandlot”, and Jennings and Tennyson can quote most of it by heart, but that means they also know the part where Hamilton Porter levies the worst insult you can give a prepubescent baseball playing kid in the summer of 1962: “You play ball like a GIRL!” It’s funny, but it’s not funny. We explain to our children that it’s funny, but it’s not, because there are a lot of girls who play baseball way better than a lot of boys, and that girls can do anything boys can do and often much better. We counter it by watching another baseball movie, A League of Their Own,

which Jennings refers to as the movie with the drunk coach, where women do indeed play baseball and play it well and with passion, but I digress. So in the end, I assembled a team of some of the best people I know to discuss masculinity through experience and talk a little bit about how that term or our experiences of it have informed our spiritual journeys and relationships with God and God's children. Without further ado I am happy to have them introduce themselves . . .

So . . . having concluded our conversation, I'll make our co-facilitators, our participants in this conversation, listen to me once again before we all say goodbye and sign off. On Fathers' Day, we typically take time to honor those who we believe played a pivotal role in the lives of tiny humans they raised into mature, responsible, well-rounded people who treat others with dignity, respect, and kindness.

It is important, however, to remind ourselves, as we in the church attempt to do each year at this time, and as we did here today, that not every father deserves praise all the time or even at all sometimes. This doesn't necessarily mean that we shouldn't recognize and/or thank our fathers where credit is due, but based on our experience of what the fathers in our lives, if we had them, taught us, we should stop and think about whether that had anything to do with what we believe is masculine or feminine and whether or not that matters.

Additionally, it is important now more than ever to point out that what we refer to as traditional roles assigned by gender that get associated with what life lessons and values can or should be taught by a parent based on their gender are nothing more than limitations to God's fearfully and wonderfully made children achieving their full potential. Even this panel illustrates our own limitations on who we celebrate for raising a child in this world—no transgender participants; or LGBTQ; no child raised by single mother or father or child raised by two women or two men. Masculinity is also viewed differently in so many cultures and viewed differently by so many people based on their own experiences. Is a person raised by two women less masculine or

more feminine than a person raised by a single heterosexual man? Is a person raised by two single homosexual men more or less masculine than a person raised by a single heterosexual woman?

Setting aside antiquated roles and outdated stereotypes, being masculine or feminine isn't about being a man or being a woman. Rebecca, in a very pastoral attempt to assist me in my fool's errand of defining masculinity, expressed that maybe "healthy" masculinity isn't masculinity but humanity. When Laura and I discussed the topic, she labeled it as our ability to be vulnerable, which I believe makes you a better person or makes one more human, able to live with humanity towards other children of God.

Being a child of God who treats other children of God with dignity and respect isn't about fatherhood or motherhood. It isn't about masculine or feminine. Being a child of God who shares God's love with others in vulnerability and inclusivity is about humanity. If you are a parent or provide care and rearing for a child, we recognize and honor that that is one of the most difficult jobs on the planet. This panel all expressed to some degree that we learned about masculinity through experience with a guide, or several guides, in our lives.

Perhaps the hardest part of being a caregiver, mentor, or teacher of life to any person is the job of teaching humanity. At the end of the day, we are all beloved children of God, created by God in God's image, and are loved by God. Healthy masculinity is not about gender roles and which parent based on gender can instill in a new generation what it means to be masculine or feminine. Healthy masculinity, healthy femininity, healthy humanity is about one thing: remembering that we are respectfully and wonderfully knit together in the image of God, which means with each person we encounter we are encountering the divine among us. God loves each of us so much that God takes the time and care to carefully and wonderfully knit us together and asks us to share that same love with each other.

On a day our society chooses to celebrate Fathers and Fatherhood, maybe it is time we begin thinking of everyone as a parent to each other caring for one another and instilling human values in one another. It is time we love and care for one another and rear one another as though we have a parental responsibility to each person we encounter to protect and care for that person not because that is a masculine or feminine trait, but because that is a holy trait and a human trait. It is time for us to care for other children of God celebrating our universal parenthood of care for others . . . for no other reason than . . . we are fearfully and wonderfully made.