

Title: Just Like His Father
Text: Various
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Date: 5 September, 2011

We have a lot of babies around church at the moment. It's fantastic! I love looking at a new baby and observing how they resemble their parents. Oh, 'She's just like her father!' Or, 'He's just like his mother!'

The term, 'just like his father' can mean different things. When I cradle a baby, looking at her intently and say 'She's just like his father', I am celebrating the amazing gift of creative life. But there is another meaning to 'just like his father.' From time to time Sue cleans out my son Joel's room. It takes most of the day and requires her to put on a biological hazard suit. Recently she found a container of leftover pasta Joel was meant to take to school for lunch. It was weeks and weeks old and had taken on a color and odor that was ripe, to say the least. Later that day I texted my parents to tell them what had happened. I got a one sentence reply. 'You must be so proud – just like his father.'

Today is Father's day – a day when we celebrate the gift of fatherhood and where we can celebrate the fact that God is our heavenly Father.

Let me say up front that the Bible gives us lots of images for the character and nature of God. God is Spirit and is therefore neither male nor female. The catechism or teaching of the Catholic Church says this:

God transcends the human distinction between the sexes. He is neither man nor woman: he is God.
(Catechism of the Catholic Church, 239)

The Protestant church believes the same. Put crudely, God is not a boy or a girl. God is god – infinitely beyond our capabilities to comprehend him other than through what he reveals of himself to us.

We cannot limit God to human categories. Having said this, in the Bible God uses male and female imagery to describe his character and nature. For example, in Isaiah we read:

As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you.
(Isaiah 66:12)

Earlier in Isaiah we read this:

You, O Lord, are our Father.
(Isaiah 63:16)

In the Bible, God is described as having the attributes of a loving mother and father. Having said this, nowhere in the bible is God addressed as mother, while there are numerous occasions in the Old and especially the New Testament where God is addressed as 'Father.' When Jesus himself prayed he prayed to the Father.

So of God is our Father, what sort of Father is he?

The great 12th century theologian Thomas Aquinas, after writing one of the greatest theological works of the last two thousand years, Summa Theologica, said that he had not even begun to comprehend the nature of God the Father.

Thomas Aquinas was one of the most brilliant minds to ever live. What hope do we have? Let's at least begin.

In the first chapter of John's gospel we read this:

No one has ever seen God.
(John 1:18a)

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Moses led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, led himself by the presence of God. At one point Moses asks to see God's glory. God responds by saying that he will pass before Moses, but that:

You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.
(Exodus 33:20)

God is holy, other, infinite, pure – everything that we are not.

Left here we could be forgiven in believing that God our Father is distant and removed from us. But we are not left here. Let's go back to John's gospel. We read:

No one has ever seen God...but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.
(John 1:18)

John is talking clearly about Jesus.

John is saying that Jesus is the One and Only – that Jesus is God.

John is saying that while no one has seen God the Father, in seeing the Son, we see the Father.

John is saying that Jesus is just like his Father.

And just so we get the point, Jesus himself makes this plain:

Anyone who has seen me has seen the father.
(John 14:9)

Paul puts it this way in Colossians:

He is the image of the invisible God.
(Colossians 1:15)

The writer of Hebrews says this:

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.
(Hebrews 1:3)

The Greek word translated as the phrase 'exact representation' literally means the impression left by a coin or seal when pressed into hot wax.

When we see Jesus, we see the Father.

If this is true, then what in Jesus do we see that reveals what God our Father is like? There are years and years of sermons in that question. Today I want to briefly focus on two things we see in Jesus that reveals the Father heart of God.

First, God our Father is Creator. In John's gospel we read this:

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.
(John 1:3)

John asserts that Jesus was the Word that existed before time as we know it began and who spoke the universe into being. It is a staggering claim. John illustrates and emphasises this claim in the first miracles of Jesus he records in his
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gospel. Jesus, his mother and his disciples were at a wedding feast when the wine had run out. This was a major embarrassment for the wedding hosts and Mary cajoles Jesus her son to do something about it. He instructs that six stone jars be filled with water, all together about 600 litres. When the wedding host then drew out the water it had turned to Grange Hermitage wine – the absolute best. What is going on here? Is John saying that if you have a wedding, Jesus should be at the top of your invitation list? This is how John finishes his account of the miracle:

This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory.
(John 2:11)

Jesus revealed his glory as the Creator – the one who has power over matter. He did the same when he took five loaves and two fish and transformed them into a banquet for thousands. He did the same thing when he filled the nets of the fishermen with a miraculous catch of fish.

When we see Jesus, we see the Father.

When we read Genesis 1 and 2, the Bible's accounts of God creating the Universe and all it contains – we get a sense that creation itself is an expression of God's very nature and character. God was at pains to pause each step along the way and declare that all he had made was good.

This clip I am about to show is from a children's video that imagines what it was like for Jesus to breathe our world into being.

Show Video Clip

In him, through him and for him all things were created. In Jesus we see that our Father is Creator.

The prophet Isaiah said this:

You, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.
(Isaiah 64:8)

The pinnacle of God's creation is us – you and me. God has formed and created us to bear his image. We are image bearers of God. This is the fundamental reason why all human life is precious.

In Psalm 17:8, David describes himself as the apple of God's eye:

Keep me as the apple of your eye.
(Psalm 17:8)

What does this mean? When you look intently into the eyes of another person you can see a tiny reflection of yourself in the dark pupils of their eyes. When we look to God, David is saying, we see a tiny reflection of ourselves as God states lovingly and attentively at us.

We are the apple of God's eyes.

The truth is that there are times where we feel anything but the pinnacle of God's creation – the apple of God's eye. We have our flaws – physical, emotional and spiritual. We are broken people. So is it too much to believe that we are God's image-bearers?

In Jesus we see that God our Creator did not form us to forget us, but rather drew near to us – became human flesh himself in order that he might demonstrate his radical love for us. For God, all human life is precious.

A woman called Mary Ann Bird writes this:

I grew up knowing I was different, and I hated it. I was born with a cleft palate, and when I started school, my classmates made it clear to me how I looked to others: a little girl with a misshapen lip, crooked nose, lopsided teeth, and garbled speech.

When schoolmates asked, "What happened to your lip?" I'd tell them I'd fallen and cut it on a piece of glass. Somehow it seemed more acceptable to have suffered an accident than to have been born different. I was convinced that no one outside my family could love me.

There was, however, a teacher in the second grade whom we all adored--Mrs. Leonard by name. She was short, round, happy--a sparkling lady. Annually we had a hearing test. ... Mrs. Leonard gave the test to everyone in the class, and finally it was my turn. I knew from past years that as we stood against the door and covered one ear, the teacher sitting at her desk would whisper something, and we would have to repeat it back--things like "The sky is blue" or "Do you have new shoes?"

I waited there for those words that God must have put into her mouth, those seven words that changed my life. Mrs. Leonard said, in her whisper, "I wish you were my little girl." God says to every person deformed by sin, "I wish you were my son" or "I wish you were my daughter."

In sending us his son Jesus, God our Father does not whisper, but shouts to us: 'I have created you in my image. You are my masterpiece. I long for you to live as my son, as my daughter!'

This leads me to my second point; through Jesus we see that our Father is Creator.

Through Jesus we also see that our Father is Redeemer.

Even though every human being is created in the image of God, we carry our flaws – our emotional and spiritual scars. The Bible says that these flaws are the result of sin – our rebellion against God. Sin enslaves us, it imprisons us. Sin holds us back from enjoying the life God created and intended us to live.

God saw our predicament and determined to not stand back, but to do something:

In his first letter, John writes this:

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

(1 John 4:9-10)

Jesus – the One and Only – God clothed in human flesh - came, lived among us and died on the Cross for us in order that we could be freed from our bondage to sin. The word 'redeem' means to 'buy back'. In ancient times a redeemer bought back a slaves freedom.

At the heart of the Christian message is this: God our heavenly Father has bought back our freedom, not with money or gold or any other riches – but with the blood of his son Jesus.

Our Father is Redeemer.

Jeffrey Ebert was five years old when his family was involved in a car crash. This is what he says:

I was sitting on my mother's lap when another car, driven by a drunk driver, swerved into our lane and hit us head-on. I don't have any memory of the collision. I do recall the fear and confusion I felt as I saw myself literally covered with blood from head to toe.

Then I learned that the blood wasn't mine at all, but my mother's. In that split second when the two headlights glared into her eyes, she instinctively pulled me closer to her chest and curled her body around mine. It was her body that slammed against the dashboard, her head that shattered the windshield. She took the impact of the collision so that I wouldn't have to. It took extensive surgery for my mother to recover from her injuries.

In a similar, but infinitely more significant way, Jesus Christ took the impact for our sin, and his blood now permanently covers our lives.

The sin that mars our life means that we are heading for certain spiritual death. On the cross, Jesus sheds his blood, not just to demonstrate the extent of his love, but to buy back our freedom in order that we might live and live forever. Paul puts it this way in Ephesians:

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace...in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.
(Ephesians 1:7, 2:13)

We who were once estranged from God our Father now are brought near to him again through the blood of Jesus. We can pray to him with confidence, 'Our Father, who is in heaven. Hallowed be your name.'

CS Lewis puts it this way:

The Son of God became man to enable men to become the sons of God.
(C.S. Lewis)

A few months after our son Joel was born, Sue and I had a date night. We left Joel with my parents and went to a film. Now you would think we would have seen a nice, safe romantic comedy. But no, we went to see Schindler's List. It wrecked me. This brilliant film recounts the true story of Oskar Schindler, a German businessman, who through cunning and conniving, bribery and corruption buys the safety of more than 1000 Jewish workers through the horrors of the Holocaust. In the process Oskar Schindler spends most of his fortune. In one of the final scenes of the film, Schindler prepares to escape the advancing allied forces. As he does, he says farewell to the men, women and children he has rescued. Let's watch what happens:

PLAY SCENE

In Jesus the Son we see that God our Father has done all He can, that He has held nothing back in buying back our freedom, in rescuing us from spiritual death. God, our Father, our Redeemer could not have done more. He has spent all that he has to rescue us from death.

This week I read the story of some grandparents who looked after their two young grandsons while their parents had a week-long holiday. The grandparents and kids had a wow of a time. Lois Wyse once said:

If I had known how wonderful it would be to have grandchildren, I'd have had them first.
(Lois Wyse)

All was going well until the children's parents rang. Let me read Grandma's account:

The phone rang. It was Brian and Becky, and the boys jumped up to chat. As each one took a turn talking with their mom and dad, the tears began to flow. Soon, they were both inconsolable. The whole situation had become too much. The boys were tired, their mom and dad were soooooo far away, and, as much as they love me, they wanted them.

When we finally got back to the bedroom, I tried to quiet them as best I could. Josh eventually fell asleep with his mouth wide open, still crying. Nate, being older, couldn't stop thinking about his parents. He was like a record stuck in one spot, and he was wearing a groove so deep that I had no idea how to help him. Through the

wailing, his shaking arms reached out to me, and his little voice spoke some very profound words: "Grandma, I'm homesick, and I am home. How can that be?"

This world is our home, provided by Our Father who is our loving Creator.

This world is our home, but we will always feel homesick in it unless we meet and have a relationship with Our Father who is our Redeemer.