

## Pastor Roy's sermon from June 15, 2014

Happy Father's Day! Happy Trinity Sunday! Both are a reminder that relationships are central to our Faith. Our experience of our fathers is vital for all of our life, just as is our experience of our mothers. Relationships between parents and children are essential for growing up and forming healthy attitudes. The relationships influence us as parents and children of parents. Even if the child or parent is no longer alive. Each relationship is unique and much like a puzzle, or a well, or a garden to tend. We receive in direct proportion to what we give. The same is true for our life of prayer with God as we experience God in relationship. We receive as we invest.

Christians live with the mystery of God in relationship: Father, Son, and Spirit. It is not possible to know God or to relate to God except in relationship. Anything else is thinking mere thoughts about God. That is ideas and we are able to think many ideas, regardless of their truthfulness. Healthy relationships bring truth and deep understanding. We relate to one another and to all of creation. We cannot with any meaning relate to God except in our relationships with one another and all of creation.

Relationships between children and fathers are as equally life-giving and love driven as the life of prayer. **If we truly seek God, we are seeking to know and practice love. We relate in love, for God is love. This love in the Old and New Testaments is concerned about the poor, is concerned about justice which is not as much about who owns what, but of the need to care for others and all of creation. Justice is not a tool of greed but of compassion. It is a concern for those who are most vulnerable, because we all are vulnerable—as hard as we try to cover it up and ignore it. When we realize we are one with the vulnerable, with those in trouble, with those who are hungry, in prison and whose parents are in prison, and those who do not have decent, affordable homes.**

We like to think that everyone can make it if they try hard enough. We like to think that God doesn't give anyone any more than they can handle. But what does that mean? Does it allow us to ignore others' needs because God and they can take care of themselves?

We cannot right all the wrongs that are out there. Our parish, on its own, cannot feed the world. We cannot assure meaningful jobs and decent housing for everyone. Virtually every week, we learn of new areas where there are refugees fleeing their homes for reasons of political and racial violence. It's overwhelming. Sometimes I want to stop listening to the news and reading the emails which tell me of new injustices and violence.

We cannot solve all the problems. But we can continue to help a few. Get to know and help a few people locally, and even internationally. We can work at the relationships. We can love. We can serve. We can call and write representatives and senators. We can let them know they have our permission to follow their consciences and level the playing field for the most vulnerable. Compassion will not break the economy or our country, fear and greed will break us—spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

For example, at Synod Assembly this year we discussed some of these issues. Amy Reumann from Lampa which is the Lutheran Advocacy program in Pennsylvania, raised the issue of hunger. The State Food Purchase Program has existed for 30 years and is the primary source for Pennsylvania's food banks, community food pantries, and other nutrition programs. Since 2006 the program has been cut while the eligible population increases. The governor's budget for next year provides 17 million in the program which is close to last year's amount. 21 million would restore half of the buying power that has been lost to inflation since 2006. At assembly we were given paper plates upon which to write a note to Mike Regan or Pat Vance to encourage them to push for more money in the Governor's budget for the State Food Purchase Program.

At the national level, there is a bill which is ready to come before the Senate which has successfully passed the judiciary committee which would provide for a reduction in sentences for low-level and nonviolent drug crimes. The cost of imprisonment is reducing and eliminating funding for more long term preventative measures. Unfortunately, longer prison terms sound good and make it look as though a politician is tough on crime. The

reality is that such leaders are more likely sustaining crime by supporting responses which crush families and support a culture of dependence and dysfunctionality.

The reality is that none of these issues is simple and our problems are not easily solved. The Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in PA and ELCA Advocacy in DC are resources to help us to understand and be more aware of issues in our legislative bodies from a Lutheran perspective. Political commercials are obviously not helpful for understanding issues; and often, news programs fail to present all sides of an issue, maybe partly because of advertising needs and concerns for ratings.

If you use the internet, it's easy to be connected to the PA and national advocacy programs. Go onto the parish website, follow the link to the Lower Susquehanna Synod website and enter advocacy to their search engine. For national advocacy programs, follow the link to the ELCA website and enter advocacy. In my own poking around, I discovered that you can sign up to receive email notices about issues and upcoming votes with the ELCA advocacy network. You can even edit and send letters which are written by our advocates after you enter your information. So I learned how to be better connected to issues and the rest of the church at our assembly this year.

As I mentioned, part of our experience of God as Trinity is the relationships we form as church, community, and with all of creation. We do not and cannot relate to God in a vacuum. God is revealed in all of our relationships. Our concern for justice and peace is an expression of our love for and from God. Perhaps it is something we learned from our parents, hopefully it is something we can share with the children.

Our relationships begin and grow in prayer. May these be the growing edge of our lives. Amen.