

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Trinity Sunday and Father's Day
“Strength through Vulnerability”
The Reverend Dr. Scott Everett Couper
Christian Scripture: Luke 15:11-32
Sunday, 16 June 2019



I apologize for preaching on this particular scripture both at the end of March and today. But, the story is so perfect. I desire to capture so much this Sunday.



Like last Sunday, when we celebrated Pentecost *and* Holy Baptism, this Sunday I wish to celebrate Father's Day *and* Trinity Sunday. There is just so much that is beautiful and worthy to celebrate in our Christian tradition, and, to a fault, I want to wallow in all of it.



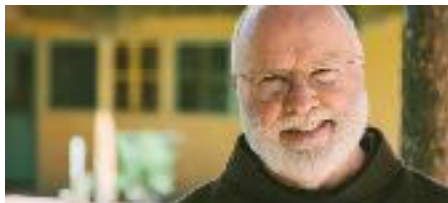
Our story is about a father and a son (or rather, two). Hence, it is very appropriate for Father's Day. Yet, our scripture is also about the Holy Spirit. This Sunday, Trinity Sunday, I want to say something about all three: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



But first, in honor of Father's Day, I have picked-out three, in true Trinitarian form, 'Dad jokes' from my 'Dad's Jokes' app. that I have installed on my phone with which I use to torture my kids every once in a while.

1. Number one: Daughter: “Dad, I’m cold.” Dad: “Go stand in a corner. It’s 90 degrees.”
2. Number two: I’ve always admired fishermen. Now those are *reel* men.
3. Number three: Wanna hear a joke about a stone? Never mind, I’ll just *skip* that one.

So, no more dilly-dallying. Let me make my three points about the Holy Trinity. Nann Man and I listened to Father Richard Rohr during our podcast devotional on Friday and we heard him remind us that many have identified the Holy Spirit as “the lost person of the Blessed Trinity”.¹



Rohr pointed out that the Holy Spirit is the lost person because the Spirit is impossible to describe. The Spirit is a person of God who defies explanation because there is no language, no vocabulary, no words, and no description that can completely capture its essence. I can preach for hours and never approximate it. But I tell you this: I know it when I see it. I know it when I feel it. And so, I think, do you.

¹ Richard Rohr. “Litany of the Holy Spirit, Pentecost Sunday”, homily, 9 June 2019.



I saw and felt the Holy Spirit watching an emotional scene during the French Open at Roland Garros. In the clip I showed you,

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-06/nicolas-mahut-emotional-moment-with-son-roland-garros-goes-viral/11184446>

Nicolas Mahut lost in the third round of the tournament and after breaking down in tears, was comforted by his son, who ran onto the court to hug, console and comfort him.



The Holy Spirit compels us and the Holy Spirit interprets for us. The Holy Spirit, more often than not, compels us to do that which we might not normally do. It compelled Nicolas to allow himself to be vulnerable, even weak, to an entire stadium and to an international television audience. It compelled Nicolas' young son to risk being

tackled by security guards, and it compelled the security guards to *not* intercept the boy. The Holy Spirit moved his opponent, Leonardo Mayer, to tears. The Holy Spirit caused him to lose sight of that which was *not* important, winning, and to realize what *was* important: solidarity rooted in love. And the Holy Spirit moved a stadium and a global audience to recognize wherein true greatness, true strength of character, and true honor lie.

At the conclusion of the third round of the French Open, the “lost ‘third’ person of the Blessed Trinity” taught us about the nature of the ‘first’ person of the Trinity: the Father (also known as the Mother), the Creator, and the great ‘I Am’.



A key characteristic of the Father is that his strength - his masculine, fatherly, strength - is best sensed is best demonstrated in vulnerability.

In our scripture read by Clyde, a very faithful father to his children, we read how the man with two sons demonstrated his strength through vulnerability. In the first instance, the father shows great vulnerability by giving away to his son the three’s collective

property. I sense the father did not wish to order his son's obedience; he did not want to force his son to remain on the land; he did not demand his son's love. He gave his son a choice. And that choice offered requires great vulnerability because allegiance can be betrayed, trust can be violated, and love can be rejected.



Our Father in Heaven gives us this same choice out of the same great vulnerability. We can reject our Father in Heaven's love and it can injure us and God deeply. Yet, love does not force or demand.

Even after the father's love is rejected, the father still showed vulnerability to both his sons. When the Bible says something more than once, we need to pay very careful attention.



Verse twenty reads, “But while [the wayward son] was still a long way off his father saw him, and [...] He ran to meet him...” and verse twenty-eight “his father *went out* and pleaded with [the loyal son]” who was out on the farm away from the house. Now, not once, but twice, we have the father *going out* to meet the son. In Ancient Near East culture, that was very hierarchical, and thus very patriarchal, no dignified man would *run* to his sons.



This would be a most humiliating and degrading gesture to two stubborn and ungrateful sons. In his running-out to both sons, playing anything but ‘hard to get’, the father showed great vulnerability.



Friends in Christ, our Father in Heaven also runs after us over and over and over and over again, despite our constant efforts to separate

ourselves from, and our own efforts to play ‘hard to get’ with, our Creator.



While the two sons in the parable do not represent Jesus, they nonetheless can illuminate for us what it means to be the faithful Son of God. Despite their selfish natures, the sons demonstrate to us the characteristics of the ‘second’ person of the Trinity, the Son, who is Jesus. The loyal son was just that, loyal. He was dutiful. He was obedient. The loyal son was faithfully dedicated to his father. Even the wayward son, at the end of the story, was humble, willing to serve, and expected very little gracious, if anything, from his father.



Jesus also exhibited these positive traits. Jesus submitted himself, in all humility, to his Father in Heaven. Jesus subjected himself and was willing to endure hardship. This occurred in the desert. In the Jordan River, Jesus humbled himself, even as a sinner, and participated in that which was a rite of repentance for John the Baptist and everyone else there present. Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane prayed, “Not my will, but thy will be done”.



Friends, if you are a father, show your strength by allowing yourself to be vulnerable with your children. And, if you are a child of a father, who all of you are, may you not betray and abuse any vulnerability demonstrated by him. Fathers, love lies in vulnerability. Children, love lies in you seeing strength in that vulnerability.

This was the word of God, and it was preached to the people of God, and the people of God responded, “Amen”.