**Reflection for 21 June 2020 – Father’s Day**

Now, do we put the apostrophe between the r and the s to celebrate the day of the Father? Or is it after the s to celebrate the day of Fathers? You decide!!

But yes, it’s that time of year again where we celebrate our Fathers, step-fathers, those who’ve been like a father, etc, etc with cards and gifts. We have a double celebration in our house as it’s our son’s birthday on the same day.

Father’s day was introduced in Spokane, **Washington** at the YMCA in 1910 by Sonora Smart Dodd, who was born in Arkansas. Its first celebration was in the Spokane YMCA on June 19, 1910. Her father, the Civil War veteran William Jackson Smart, was a single parent who raised his six children there (thanks Google!).

Over the past 110 years, we have celebrated fathers in a variety of ways. Even the cards we send have expanded to include step-fathers; those who have been like a father; those with 2 fathers and even a card from the cat!

The role of a father was traditionally that of discipline, “wait till your dad gets home”; or being a role model in terms of work ethic and being the wage earner. Today, those stereotypes are interchangeable with mums and other care givers.

What happens if your relationship with your father is a difficult one? What if you have never known who your father is? Or if the father you thought was yours turns out not to be? This is not just storyline material for soap operas – it really happens!

How do we care for those for whom the idea of fatherhood is a scary one? For newly expectant dads, where the attention is on the growing bump and they must stand aside? For new dads who perhaps don’t know one end of a nappy from the other and must literally learn on the job? For dads of teenagers who are rebelling or being difficult as they struggle to control their hormones? For dads of newlyweds releasing the bonds of parenthood so their offspring can make their own way? For dads who feel they can no longer be dads as their health means that their children become their carers? Or even for men who have never wanted to, or cannot for medical reasons, be dads? And those whose dads are no longer here?

Fatherhood is complicated. It’s often messy. It’s often broken. But fatherhood can bring amazing rewards, love, companionship, shared relationship – when it works.

So, while we’re celebrating and spoiling our dads with breakfast in bed, giving out handmade cards from the kids, or having virtual conversations via zoom or skype, let us spare a thought for those for whom this is a difficult day. Share a hug (virtually at the moment), a smile, a prayer for all dads everywhere.

Finally, you may wonder why I’ve not used God the Father as the ultimate template for fatherhood. If you struggle with the concept of fatherhood, then promoting the God of love as a Father figure would not be helpful. What I will say is that the God of love, who is beyond gender, is there for us all – as we celebrate or as we grieve; as we prosper or as we struggle. If we turn to God, we will receive the strength, comfort and love we need to see the light in the darkness. Trust in God for God will never let us down.

Keep safe

RevRuth