

Today is Father's Day in the United States. Other countries celebrate Father's Day on different days or don't even celebrate it at all. Pastor Sunny told me that there is no Father's Day or Mother's Day in Korea but Parents' Day, which is May 8th.

I have an ambivalent relationship with Mother's Day and Father's Day. I wonder how people spend these days if their mother or father is deceased. This was my experience in 1976 when my mother died when I was 14. I dreaded Mother's Day each year until I decided to celebrate those who stepped up to mother me, including my oldest sister, who is attending church with me today, and my father. If you have a father or you are a father who is a solid man and a good parent, I celebrate with you. If you don't have a solid relationship with your father, I mourn with you.

Today's message is somewhat personal, as I drafted the message from my personal experience. However, I would also say that it is not just personal because I know many others have similar experiences as I have. So, please bear with me.

When we say the Lord's Prayer, we say, "Our Father." Whenever we say this, I feel like we are masculinizing God more than the tradition can bear. I feel like we make God into less than God by calling God "Father." I am also aware that the Lord's Prayer is Jesus' personal prayer based on His relationship with His earthly father, Joseph. Joseph was not Jesus' biological father, and yet he embraced Jesus as his son. Talking about Jesus' earthly family and the family relationship will be another sermon 😊

So, let me go back to "Our Father" talk in the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer is Jesus' personal prayer and yet to which we, the followers of Jesus Christ, are asked to pray with Him. Because of that, Jesus states "Our Father," not "My Father," inviting us to have a personal relationship with God like He has.

Then, I question: Is our view of "Our Father in heaven" based on our relationship or non-relationship with our earthly father? Is our relationship with God based on love? Respect? Kindness? Or is it based on Judgment? Shame? How do you think our church, Kona UMC, or the greater United Methodist Church is seen by others?

Let me share my family's experience with "the church." Our son came out to Wayne and me that he was gay when he was 18 years old. A few years earlier, Matthew Shepard was beaten, tortured, and left to die near Laramie, Wyoming. I've never doubted my love for my son or God's love for my son. I live in fear that someone will kill him due to his sexual orientation. Christians have told me that my son will go to hell. Christians state that they love the LGBTQI community but in the following sentence state that "homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teachings." Does it sound familiar? That statement is in the United Methodist Church's Book of Discipline.

You may ask, "How do I attend a United Methodist Church when this is still unresolved within our denomination?" I often ask that myself, and I live in the hope that someday, I will be at peace with my decision. I hope that one day the United Methodist Church will add sexual orientation and gender identification to the following statement, again in our Book of Discipline:

"In The United Methodist Church, no conference or other organizational unit of the Church shall be structured to exclude any member or any constituent body of the Church because of race, color, national origin, status or economic condition."

Do we really need to address this? November 20th is Transgender Day of Remembrance or TDOR. Each year transgender people are brutally murdered, and annually services are held around the world to remember the Transgender people that were murdered that year. I attended services at the First United Methodist Church in Bellevue, Washington, where over 200 names were read. Estimates of the number of murders are underreported. The Trevor Project reports that suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth 10-24 years old. LGBTQI youth? They are 4 times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers. Is this the message that the church wants to send to the LGBTQI community and the community beyond? To myself? To my son and his husband? Is this the fatherly love that Christians talk about? Do we prefer that the LGBTQI community hide itself? Leave the church? Get murdered? Die by suicide?

These days I'm at peace with God, with the "church," and with those who say hurtful and somewhat downright evil things about our siblings in the LGBTQI community. I love God. God loves me. And if my son is going to hell, then I don't stand a chance and will be joining him. My son is a much better human than I am in so many ways. It's a pity that people will judge him or hate him based on his sexual orientation. May you be open and loving to all regardless of race, ethnicity,

national origin, status, economic condition, sexual orientation, or gender identity. May you be blessed by the love and friendship of the LGBTQI community. I know I am.

My father was a tough Nebraskan farm boy. He was a conservative man who loved to curse. He was an Army veteran. My father did not attend church based on the hypocrisy he saw in organized religion. I picked a wonderful husband based on my relationship with my father, whom I loved dearly. My father loved my son unconditionally, and that didn't change when I told him my son Grant was gay. That's how I look at my relationship with God. I can tell God anything, and my God continues to love me. I hope and pray that this is your relationship with your father or father figure. And if you are a father, I hope this is the love that you show your children, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Let me finish with the reading of 1 John 4:7 from the Hawaiian Pidgeon Bible:

My good frenz, we gotta get love an aloha fo each odda, cuz love an aloha come from God. Erybody dat get love an aloha, dey God kids an dey know God.

Let us love one another. Amen.