

**Article**

**“Thoughts for Fathers’ Day”**

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St James the Less Penicuik

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OUTREACH

# Thoughts for Fathers' Day

*Rev'd Neville Suttle is a non-stipendiary Minister, serving St James the Less church. This article was a sermon that Rev'd Neville gave at St James the Less church on Father's Day 2018*

The Gospel reading for UK Fathers' Day 2018, chosen by Rev'd Lynsay for the occasion, was the one appointed for St Joseph's Day: Luke 2 v 41-51. I knew what was coming and did not complain. As the years go by I think I'm becoming more compliant! We had agreed when arranging the rota that I could change the service readings if I wished. I thought I might have to, as Joseph only makes transient appearances in two of the four gospels.

*Image: <http://picssr.com/tags/sn57gmy/interesting>*



In a previous sermon I had likened the different gospels to the four main bus services between Penicuik and Edinburgh, running at different times through the day and by different routes to the same destination, stopping at different places. Today we were taking the daytime 47 service (Luke's Gospel) and getting off for Surgeon's Hall, the capital's facade that most resembles a temple!

Luke's storyline tells of an adolescent Jesus going AWOL in the Temple at the Passover Festival. For 24 hours his parents were unconcerned, thinking he must be with others in the family party, a detail that says much about the strength of wider family bonds on such occasions. The surprising thing is that Joseph - his father - is conspicuous by his absence. In a patriarchal society, the father would normally be keeping a close eye on his firstborn son, grooming him in the religious customs. Although both parents are said to return to the city, it is Mary that does all the talking and reflecting, something that would never have happened if we had caught the No. 37, driven by Matthew!

The distinctiveness of Luke's storytelling is a reminder that he, like the others, was assuming the role of 'father' to his readers, giving a personal, motivational explanation for something that others experienced of "God", usually viewed as a Person and Father of all. In chapter 2, verse 41, Luke is trying to explain what might have happened when Jesus first became self- and spiritually-aware, aware of powers beyond the norm.

Luke envisages Jesus as a precocious adolescent; brought up in a devout family and dragged round the temple every year at Passover festival; someone who would start asking questions, wondering what all the fuss about; he would go to the top, interrogate those who ought to know. Then, being dissatisfied with the answers would begin offering his own answers. These few verses are Jesus' ministry in a microcosm. Unlike contemporary tales of Greek folk heroes, 'wonderkids' all, Jesus' early achievements were relatively mundane but believable enough to shock any father, even today: is that why we hear so little of Joseph?



<http://www.supercoloring.com>

My younger daughter, Theresa, marked Father's Day by posting me John Selby Spong's latest book- 'Unbelievable'. The cover suggests that the contents are explosive stuff. It is partly autobiographical and charts 'Jack's'

life-story from early beginnings. There are interesting parallels with the Jesus story, as told by Luke. Jack Spong is now in his 88<sup>th</sup> year and in this, his 27<sup>th</sup> and probably last, book, he calls for a 'New Reformation' that makes Martin Luther's reformation look like a change of menu in the Vatican Refectory! Throughout a career that saw him become Bishop of Newark, New Jersey, in the Episcopal Church of the USA, Jack (like Jesus) asked fundamental questions of religious leaders, was dissatisfied with stock religious answers and still has answers of his own.

In this book (like Martin Luther) Jack Spong posts alternative theses, twelve in all, on the metaphorical door of today's church. The first thesis concerns the very nature of "God" and struck a chord for me on Father's day. Jack suggests that we should stop viewing 'God' as A BEING at all: not a father figure; not a remote invigilator in the worlds exam room; not a remote controller of universes (with or without long grey beard). Instead, we could view "God" as "BEING", suffusing all that is. US theologian Paul Tillich suggested the same thing over 50 years ago in his book 'The Shaking of The Foundations'. Both men agree that "God" is encountered from within not without as the 'Ground of Being' but what might that mean to us on Father's Day, 2018?

Is “God” not so much A FATHER, but more the ESSENCE OF FATHERING: the instinct to create life, protect the vulnerable, to nurture, to feed? The founding fathers of Judaism knew all this in the name they gave God: YHWH, lacking vowels and never to be spoken because a human construct could never be sufficient. Our conversion to the pronounceable ‘Yaweh’ is an insult to Jewish intelligence and grossly undervalues that which devout Jews today describe as ‘G-d’. Our use of ‘Yaweh’ brings G-d down to our level, as did the temple ritual and Passover celebration that took the inquisitive Jesus to Jerusalem.

On Fathers’ Day, Fathers mop up 12 hours of adulation, if they are lucky! Many people send cards and gifts to ‘the best Father EVER’, knowing that life would be much harder without their Dad, but they can’t all be right! In our Sunday rituals, we do similar things: lavish praise on the Father of All, either feeling or hoping that we will be protected, nurtured

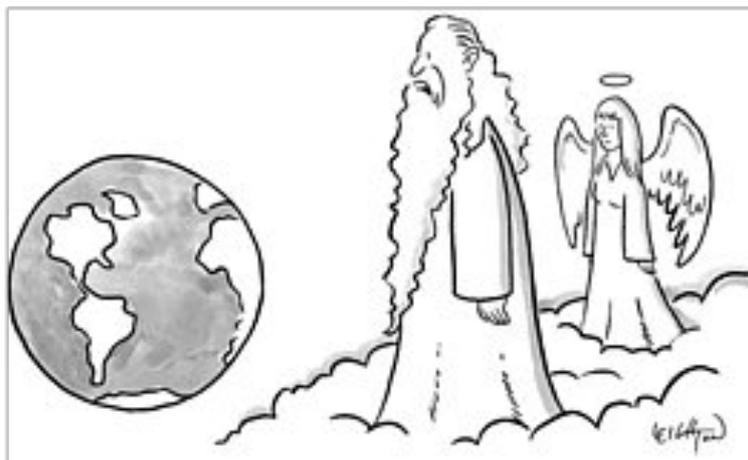
and fed forever. Is that really what creation is for?

Or is it to be, whether male or female, FOREVER FATHERING: creating, protecting, nurturing and feeding? Is this when transformation really begins?

Is this when “water begins to flow in the desert, the blind begin to see, the deaf to hear”, the signs of the kingdom anticipated in Isaiah (Ch 35). Is this when G-d is ‘fed when he was hungry’, ‘given drink when thirsty’ and ‘clothed when naked’ in Jesus’ parable of judgement (Mt 25 v31).

In BEING FATHERLY, we become one with the “Ground of Being”. As fathers today, the most important transformation we men can make is to leave less of such nurturing practices to mothers, as appeared to have happened when Joseph went AWOL in Luke’s story.

*Rev’d Neville Suttle*



“I’m starting to prefer the ones who don’t believe in me”

<https://fineartamerica.com/art/drawings/christian>