

It's Father's Day, which I qualify for, so thought of taking the day off, but I came to work instead, because that's what fathers do, and because I couldn't talk Joan into preaching for me this morning. I asked her to, but she said no. I said, "But it's Father's Day." And she said, "You're not my father." Then I asked Spencer and Sam if they would speak, but they declined. So now you must hear a sermon from the fourth choice.

It is believed the first Father's Day was held in Fairmont, West Virginia, under the direction of a woman named Grace Golden Clayton, who was mourning the loss of her own father in the Monongah mining disaster, which left over a thousand children fatherless. She asked her Methodist pastor if they might set aside a Sunday to honor fathers, and so they did on Sunday, July 5, 1908. No record remains of the sermon delivered that day, and Grace Golden Clayton was rather shy and adverse to promotion, so it went no further, until two years later when a woman in Seattle named Sonora Smart Dodd wanted to pay tribute to her father, a veteran of the Civil War, and the single parent of six children. Dodd asked her pastor if he might preach about fathers on the first Sunday in June in 1910, but he told her he needed more time to prepare and asked if he could speak about fathers on the third Sunday of June instead, and that tradition stuck.

Nevertheless, Father's Day was slow to catch on. The public and press, wary of crass commercialism, dug their feet. And not without cause, one of the early proponents of Father's Day was the New York Associated Men's Wear Retailers, who promised store owners that Father's Day could become a "second Christmas." But eventually it took hold, and is now celebrated in nearly every nation in the world. Americans spend an average of \$117 each year on their fathers. We spend an average of \$170 on Mother's Day, a difference of \$53, which tells us something about the relative popularity of fathers compared to mothers. But we fathers are used to this slight, and have learned to accept our diminished status with grace and good humor.

We in this country need a new definition of what it means to be a father, what it means to be a man. The hunter/killer/he-man/man-is-the-head-of-the-household model of manhood must go. Wherever that model of manhood has prevailed, in every country and culture where that mindset has taken root, it has resulted in the diminishment and degradation of women. It has rendered too many men incapable of expressing any emotion other than anger. That model of manhood has promoted violence as a viable response to our problems, frustrations, and fears. It has led to Orlando, and San Bernadino, and Sandy Hook. It is not coincidental that almost all of the mass shootings in the United States have been carried out by young men whose ideas and images of manhood, whose notions of what it means to be a man, were deeply, tragically, troublingly flawed.

Nor is it coincidental that the largest impediment to responsible gun legislation has been men whose image of manhood is so connected to the power to kill, they cannot imagine life without guns. “I will give up my guns when you pry them from my dead, cold fingers.” As if life without a gun is not worth living.

So on this day, on this day as we celebrate what it means to be a father, what it means to be a man, let us think deeply of a new model of manhood, a model that is appropriately strong, and appropriately tender. Let us celebrate a model of manhood that is appropriately masculine, and appropriately vulnerable. A model of manhood that is appropriately bold, and appropriately gentle.

Fatherhood, true manhood, is not dependent upon our ability to sire children, but upon our willingness to consider all the world’s children our own, to be as unswervingly devoted to their well-being as we are to our own. To be a father, to be a man, is to take the long view of life, to care as much for tomorrow’s world as today’s. It is to measure ourselves not by the wealth we have accumulated, but by the service we have rendered. To be a father, to be a man, is to dispense affection as easily as we display strength.

I have been thinking a great deal lately about the dispensing of affection, wondering why it has taken me so long to appreciate its great value. I'm not certain I would ever have thought of this if I hadn't become a grandfather. Because when my sons were little, it was very important to me to teach them about strength and discipline and how to be a man in a hard and difficult world. So there were rules and expectations and demands. Now I'm a grandfather and look at matters a bit differently. Let me tell you a story about that.

When our boys were little, I was given a red goose made of plaster that was used in a shoe store promotion for Red Goose shoes. It reminded me of my mother taking me to Haase Shoes in Plainfield when I was a kid, and made me feel nostalgic. So I really treasured the warm associations of that red goose and placed it on our fireplace hearth and told the boys never to pick it up, because I didn't want them to drop it and break it. It survived nearly 15 years without a scratch. Then last month, Madeline picked it up and dropped it and it broke in several pieces.

Spencer came to me, he said, "Dad, don't be upset, but Madeline broke your red goose."

I said, "Wow, how about that! I can't believe she was strong enough to pick it up."

Spencer just shook his head, mystified, and said, "You would have killed us if we had done that."

And he's right. I would have. But I've changed.

I've changed. I once thought the most important thing to teach children was responsibility and obedience and how to make it in a hard and difficult world. But being a grandfather has taught me that there is more to manhood than that. Now you don't have to be a grandparent to learn that. I had to become a grandparent, because I'm a slow learner. But you all are smarter than me.

It's funny what we think.

For years, I thought being a father, being a man, was all about being strong and tough. I forgot it was also about tenderness and forgiveness.

I thought being a father, being a man, was all about independence and standing on your own two feet. I forgot it was also about relationships, and that sometimes you gave help, and sometimes you needed help.

I thought being a father, being a man, was all about getting ahead and building wealth and being a success. I forgot, in the words of Clarence the Angel in *It's a Wonderful Life*, that no man is a failure who has friends.