

This might seem like a strange way to start a father's day sermon but we do live in interesting times.

A few weeks ago I conducted a marriage for gay friends. It was a very simple affair. Just them, two witnesses, Mark taking the photos and I as the celebrant.

They asked for just the basics. No preamble about marriage. No readings. No Lighting candles. Just what was legally required?

We sat round the dining room table and when they were ready we did it.

As we were talking someone called them the bridal party. Which was quickly changed to the groomal party which we agreed did not work. We joked for a bit. We noted that groom really only stood in relationship to the Bride. "Bride groom"

So we looked up groom, Noun A male, young man. Attendant, male servant to some one of higher rank. Origin uncertain. An officer in the English royal house.

As a verb. To tend or care for.

So here we have a linguistic foundation that a bridegroom is a servant. To care for and tend to the bride. That the bride is of more importance. The groom to a king, the groom to the bride.

So in marriage in years gone by a young woman was given and received in Marriage, and for some this was experienced as being

a chattel. The property of men, dependant on a father or male relative. And being passed over to a dependency on another male

But also at the same time we have the young man charged with 'caring for and tending too' .

And as we look back we can see examples of were a 'wife' was a chattel / property.

But we can also see that for some men a wife's to be served, tended too and cared for.

As I look back to older generations of my family I can see couples at both ends of the continuum. Grandfather and great uncles who would have laid down their lives for their wives. And others not many, who took their wives for granted.

This discussion and research remained me of the decisions, or perhaps it could be better described as instruction, when I was at the theological hall around conducting weddings. We were not to pronounce the couple to be Man and Wife in accordance with tradition. They are not terms of equality. We should use Husband and wife.

But at the first wedding I conducted, as I came to that place in the service the thought came across my mind. In the past at this moment this male in front of me would be declared to be a "Man".

Man hood did not occur at 21. It did not occur when they shot their first deer. Got a paying job. Or even if they got a woman pregnant.

Man Hood occurred when they became a bridegroom. The one to tend to and care for a wife.

Then I have said this in the past to some feminist they become defensive. And I know I am walking on unstable ground. So I need to make a disclaimer or perhaps it is a claimer. What I say may not be politically correct. If you take exception to it I ask one thing. You invite me to a coffee or a beer to discuss it rather than “cancel” me. As an ageing pale Male I might not be aware of the dangers of what I am saying.

Back to the reflection.

Now the conveying of manhood and the concept of caring for and tending a bride are historic. Things have changed over the last 100 years. Women do not need to be tended too and cared for, at least without consent. Also they are no longer to be given and received in marriage.. I think I am very safe in saying in a progressive congregation like this that we would not want to go back to these old concepts.

But I think it is important that we do not forget the deeply engrained concepts that guided the days of shivery before such acts were relabelled chauvinism.

Part of the argument against the acceptance of Homosexuality was that gay males did not take the responsibilities of caring and

tending for a wife. That we remained eternal Peter Pans that never grow up. We did not become MEN

This poem appeared in the papers throughout the US of A in 1858-59

What is a bachelor like?

Why a pump with out a handle
A mouldy tallow candle
A goose that's lost it's fellows
A noseless pair of bellows
A horse with out a saddle
A boat with out a paddle
A mule. - a fool
A two legged stool
A pest - a jest
Dreary - weary
A fish with out a tail
A ship with out a sail

A single Male was not a man, they were lost and useless.

Man hood came with a bride. And it also informed much of cultural tradition such as

‘Woman and children to the life boats’. Did you know that 19% of the men got off the Titanic while only 75% of the women did. If the titanic went down today would we see greater gender equality in the survivors.

There is something deeply engrained in our cultural heritage and genes about a role for men is caring for and protecting women and children.

Historically men were to perform the three “P’s”

Protect. Provide. And Procreate. Ie become dads so that they have more to provide for and protect.

Research by David Gilmore found, in communities from the Mediterranean to the Pacific Islands, from Southern America to Japan, nearly universally men in this role. Protecting and providing for and procreating with women. And by default or intent actively present in the lives of the children of the family.

That the woman are the treasured ones and men were the expendable ones.

Oh and much as we would like to think that the role of protecting is no longer a mans role, we only need to look at the Ukraine. Where women and children were able to leave the country while men had to stay at home. Where in Russia men were also being blocked from leaving the country. May be we have not moved as far as we thought.

The story of pre European Maori.

This is why I choose the reading about Joseph. Jesus’s father.

Joseph not only provided for Mary from his carpentry, he protected her and her child. First from stoning, secondly he took them two Egypt. Thirdly he returned them to safety in Nazareth.

In those days caring for and tending to woman was important. A single woman without a husband or father or brother to do this was very vulnerable. We see this in the story of Ruth.

But times have changed. The world we live in and particularly in places like NZ women are able to care for themselves . They no longer need to be tended to. They can provide for themselves. And the state is increasing stepping into the role of Husbands for those who cannot.

I am not arguing that this is a bad thing. From a female perspective this has been a great thing and as a society we have reaped many benefits.

However commentators are increasingly observing that some of the toxic behaviour of men is in response to a loss of identity, meaning, purpose in this new world.

That suicide is now the leading course of death for men under 50 in the UK.

Irina Dunn’s, a feminist leader in the 60’s, made the statement that “a woman needs a Man like a fish needs a bicycle” It became one of the rallying cry’s of the woman’s movement. Through hard and determined work the independence of woman is increasingly becoming a reality. The institution of marriage is no longer the disempowering institution that was once a necessity.

In the US 41% of households women are the main bread winner. In two income families where both work full time in almost half women earn as much or more than their husbands/ male partner.

Programmes to help the poor out of poverty and the Ghettos are working. They are successful. But when they are looked at from a gender perspective they are only working for women. Girls. Not boys. Girls are getting on to higher education but not boys. This is leaving an increasing number of young males without financial hope and marital prospects. And if they do get a partner and then lose their job they are highly likely to be ejected from the home as an economic burden. Where the woman is the bread winner the relationship is 50% more likely to end in divorce than a male bread winner. After centuries where men seen their responsibility as being protecting and providing for the children they sire and their mothers, when the shoe is on the other foot and they find themselves out of work or under employed they are evicted from the home as research showed in both the UK and USA.

Adams story

For men meaning and value has been seen in providing. Surveys of men and women still see majorities believing this to be so, especially among the communities with lower Ed levels. So it is no wonder that failing to do so is so devastating for men.

And for fathers today what does this mean. Increasingly fathers are not connected to their children.

Fathers day is a painful day for many men. Not that they can show the pain. While men are meant to be able to cry they are quick to be accused of suffering from emotional men flu or being wimps if they do. Oh you poor wee thing! That they have nothing to complain about compared with what women have. But for 1/3 of men separated from the mothers of their children they will not see their children after 6 years

Another 1/3 will only see them less than once a month. Only a 1/3 will have an active ongoing relationship with their children in the USA. This is why Barack Obama talked about the dad deficit.

Men worry about their sons knowing that they are underachieving at all levels of school. Under represented at university and as graduates of university.

I have already commented on the suicide rates of young men. 4 times higher than young women. Suicide is the death of despair.

Men from working classes worry that their sons are more likely to be unemployed.

Men worry for their sons in this confusing time when the source of meaning and purpose for their sons is not changing at the same pace as it has for their daughters.

The most common words in suicide notes of men are 'useless' and 'worthless' They fail in society's expectation that they will be the providers.

They worry that their sons will come under the influence of the Andrew Tates of this world. All three of the young men in my life know who Andrew Tate is and that they know teenagers who are followers.

In the fast changing world in response to feminism, masculinity has not kept up. The result is for many fathers, contact with their children is great reduced. One of my grand sons has not seen his father since he was 5. And has no memory of him other than photos. The other has not seen his father.

Our current government is to be applauded in seeing that maintenance payed for mothers on benefits is now to be directed in total to the mothers, rather than the mothers receiving the same benefit regardless of the fathers income level as it was when Anne and I separated. Fathers can now see their children benefiting. They are still able to provide.

How do we respond. The 'right' say we go back. We wind back the clock. We undo the advances of feminism. Give to men the tradition roles of protecting and providing, tending and caring.

The 'left' say we can not take our eye off the feminist goals until they are all achieved because some men still control the seats of power.

Commentators like Christine Emba, Caitlin Moran Carlyn Beccia along with Richard Reeves say For the advances of feminism to be embedded, we need to address the inequalities that the majority of men suffer. That we need to find a new meaning and purpose for men in this new world. The irony of the freeing of woman for the oppression of dependence is that it was really a co-dependency and the partner, men, have not been invited on the journey. This has exposed men's dependence on women.

We needed to explore ways that men can find meaning and purpose in this new world.

As I said last time I preached here on issues of Homosexuality unless all people are engaged and part of the change then it remains fragile and open to being reversed.

On father's day I'm saying to truly embed all the advances that feminism has brought we need to address the issues of men. And fathers

Because our wellbeing is all tied together. We all need to be moving together.

It is not an 'either or' but rather a 'both and'.

True liberation for woman will not occur till there is full liberation for men.

When Feminist Caitlin Moran asked the question on Twitter What do you find makes your man-life difficult?

She was flooded with replies. But the most common one was "Is this a trick?" "Are you asking this so you can laugh at us?" "Is this a feminist trap – are you going to retweet all of these, with the reply, 'Look at the men complaining about nothing – while women continue to endure all the true suffering'?" Catlin goes on to say: Boys, and men, have become so used to being the conversational whipping boy, and the punchline to jokes, that they could not believe that a feminist writer was genuinely asking them to talk about their problems.

True liberation for Men and Women will come when we work together. Where each story, experience is listened too and honoured. Where we take each others situations seriously and with respect. And we work together. Really together.

To quote the wisdom of our elders:

**Ki taku puawaitanga kua henea ki a koe.
My flourishing is bound up in you.**

Men's flourishing is bound up in the liberation of women.

Women's flourishing is bound up in the liberation of men.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/07/10/christine-emba-masculinity-new-model/?wpisrc=nl_most

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jul/01/caitlin-moran-whats-gone-wrong-for-men-and-the-thing-that-can-fix-them>

[A Researcher Studied The Most Common Last Words Of Suicidal Men](#) by Carlyn Beccia

Reeves Richard. Of Boys and Men. Why the modern male is struggling, why it matters, and what can be done about it. Swift press 2022