The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, 2022

St. Mary’s in Riverside

In liturgy, as in life, there is sometimes an unexpected convergence

of events and ideas

or people and places

resulting in overloads, whether insights or emotions.

Today is one of the liturgical calendar’s overload days:

when a 13th century feast

intersects with a 19th century liberation memorial

which converge with a 20th century family festival.

That is Corpus Christi, sharing temporal space

With Juneteenth and Father’s day.

What’s a preacher to do?

We have a modest example of this kind of triple convergence

every weekend when three readings

are combined in a kind of lectionary stew

with various Sundays or Feasts

whose distinctive combinations provide a sometimes flavorful

sometimes challenging amalgam of revelations to savor.

A favorite framework for trying to assembly

this weekly lectionary puzzle

Is the game of billiards.

Different from pool, which requires the player to sink the balls

In one of the six pockets around the table

Proper billiards is played on a table

with no pockets and only three balls.

You score points not by pocketing any balls,

but by driving one of the balls into both of the others

in a single stroke.

Thus, this game is all about

calculating the ricochet.

Similarly preaching for me presents the challenge

of ricocheting readings off of each other

in the hopes of some spiritual hit or insight.

Recently I’ve been intrigued by a scientific metaphor

useful for negotiating the weekly lectionary soup

or today’s festal overload: particle accelerators.

Admittedly I don’t understand much about physics or accelerators

though, like you, I recognize the name “Fermilab”[[1]](#endnote-1)

an accelerator complex just 30 miles from here.

There, as with other particle accelerators

scientists propel opposing particle beams

at virtually the speed of light

into a planned collision that provides key information

for understanding the mysterious subatomic world.

Collision might sound a bit violent as a spiritual metaphor

and the gentler language of encounter

might be preferable.

The gospels are filled with stories about Jesus encounters

with fishermen and Samaritan women

tax collectors, the infirm and the possessed.

Some of those encounters are gentle and compassionate,

but others are more like particle collisions

as when Jesus is confronted by a Syrophoenician mother[[2]](#endnote-2)

or impertinent Sadducee,[[3]](#endnote-3)

by evil spirits[[4]](#endnote-4) or indignant leaders[[5]](#endnote-5)

whose explosive outcomes provide us fresh insights

about the mystery of God in Christ.

Today’s trifecta of Corpus Christi, Juneteenth, and Father’s Day

brings together elements

from three different arenas

creating a unique multiverse of meanings:

With an ancient feast

celebrating the immeasurable gift

of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist,

A federal holiday commemorating

the declaration of freedom for enslaved people

in the last state with institutional slavery,[[6]](#endnote-6)

And a familial holiday

created by a grateful daughter in 1910

to honor her widowed father who raised her and 5 siblings

after her mother’s premature death.[[7]](#endnote-7)

While each of these memorials

was a distinctive history and purpose

when they spiritually collide in the crucible of today’s liturgy

Their commingling yields rich inspiration and mission.

For example, it is true that all three of these

Have strong overtones of joy:

The Feast of Corpus Christi evolved because,

even though the Church already had

a major eucharistic feast in Holy Thursday,

its Holy Week context disallowed unrestrained feasting.

The Juneteenth day

commemorating the legal abolishment of slavery

certainly carries joyful overtones.

And as any Hallmark card will remind you,

Confirmed by today’s many celebratory breakfasts

Father’s day is also ordinarily punctuated with joy.

There are also deep strands of gratitude across these feasts

gratitude for the real presence of Christ;

gratitude for the promise of liberation;

gratitude for the gift of parenting.

On the other hand, there are also strains of disappointment,

unfinished business, even regret

across this constellation of feasts:

Disappointment that our baptismal call

to be the living body of Christ

is so often unrealized;

Disappointment that our country’s original sin of racism

still deeply infects our national psyche;

And disappointment that sometimes parenting goes awry

child-parenting bonding is undeveloped or sundered,

and the family as domestic church[[8]](#endnote-8)

Does not live up to that grace-filled promise.

The reality is that father’s day is not always a happy day

for every family, for every child.

The grace of today’s shared feasting

in presence, liberation & family,

is the promise of a different kind of disruption

a holy disturbance that occurs

when God’s spirit colludes with our thirst for freedom

and the nurturing instincts of the human race itself …

revealing a baptismal path of authentic presence

and true liberation at the service of the whole human family.

Despite the contention of the Da Vinci Code and other tales

Jesus was not married and did not sire children,

so he is not a father in the literal sense

and today’s secular holiday seemingly

has nothing to do with him.

Yet, the gospels do portray Jesus

as one who exercises considerable parenting skills:

nurturing and correcting sometimes contentious disciples,

imparting parental wisdom in word and in deed,

and even exercising essential care-giving skills

like feeding a mob with meager resources

a miracle so often reenacted on a small scale

in so many households today,

when limited resources, exacerbated by inflation

are magnified through the grace of parental sacrifices.

Feeding folk not only meets a fundamental biological need

it is also its own form of liberation.

It is a well-established fact that human beings are disabled

from accomplishing many things

without proper nourishment.[[9]](#endnote-9)

Malnutrition can disrupt sleep patterns,

sap us of energy for accomplishing necessary work,

undermine children’s physical and mental development.

Jesus was a gifted nourisher … even on a physical level.

Evidence of that comes in the gospels themselves,

like today’s passage from Luke,

one of eight[[10]](#endnote-10) – count them eight – gospel feeding stories:

twice as many as last super stories in the gospels.

And then there were the untold ways he nourished souls:

liberating sinners from guilt

liberating the hopeless from despair

liberating the outcasts from the margins

and liberating the lost from aimless lives.

While I join in all those honoring Dad’s on this their special day

and hold in precious memory my own father

as a non-father, I also stand in solidarity with other non-fathers,

who claim both the promise and the mission of this day,

As I stand also with the African American community,

that I similarly cannot claim as my own,

yet celebrate their liberation from slavery

as they yet cry out for their unrealized equal dignity.

Many of us don’t have deep resources,

And have our own version of a few loaves and fishes,

but on this coalescing if not collision of festivals and feast,

in the image of our parent God

the emancipating Christ

a nourishing Spirit

We too are commissioned to sacrifice, to struggle, to endure

so that, no matter how modestly,

we too can multiple, nourish, and liberate for

those children of God so desperate for such care.

*Dear Dad*, is how this belated Father’s Day letter begins:[[11]](#endnote-11)

*Thank you for assuring me I wouldn't drown when the water was filling the bathtub when I was very young and very sure the water would keep coming and what would happen then? You showed me that spot under the faucet, a little emergency drain.*

*Thank you for introducing me to your favorite athletes. Joe Louis. Sugar Ray Robinson. Sam Snead. Together, we liked Joe Frazier (you were not an Ali guy) and Jack Nicklaus.*

*Thank you for all your music I didn't like then. Duke Ellington. Ella Fitzgerald. Louie Armstrong. (You were not a Charlie Parker guy). Those old albums of yours? I have them now on CD.*

*Thank you for your work bench. I kept your level and some weird massive wrench. I never saw you use it. I haven't used it. But I like having a weird massive wrench in the unlikely event a major construction project bewitches me.*

*Thank you for the golf lessons. I still can handle a nine iron, but golf didn't stick with me. Damn you, long irons.*

*Thank you for taking me to Disney World the year after it opened. You would have much rather been on a golf course, or fishing, or listening to Louie Armstrong in your La-Z-Boy, or watching Don Shula's Miami Dolphins beat everybody. But you went to the Magic Kingdom, suffered the long lines, indulged me, fathered me.*

*Thank you for maybe the greatest Christmas gift... My brother left for college. You turned his bedroom into your office. This was not my idea … his room … should be passed down to me… Then, that Christmas, you [exited] the corner bedroom [and] …actually deeded me the room – a legal document drawn up at your law office. I became the official owner of my brother's bedroom. ... I still keep the deed in a lock box just in case someone tries to steal the memory. I have become a memory hoarder, but I wish I could remember more things to thank you for [this] Father's Day. [Love, Jack]*

I don’t know anybody who got deeded the corner bedroom,

certainly didn’t happen to me

but in Christ we were all deeded the right and responsibility

to parent, to nourish, to shelter, to safeguard, to honor

to become life for others

As we are reminded on this feast

That Christ is for us.

And, to all of you who do claim the title …

A very blessed, and happy father’s day!

1. <https://www.fnal.gov/> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Mark 7:24-30 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Matt 22:23-33 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Luke 4:31-36 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Mark 14:53-65 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Juneteenth [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Father%27s\_Day [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. *Lumen Gentium,* no. 11 [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17376564/> [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Mark 6:31-44, Mark 8:1-10, Matt 14:13-21, Matt 15:32-39 [with echo in Matt 16:5-12], Luke 9:10-17, John 6:1-14. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/happy-fathers-day-belated\_b\_5475171 [↑](#endnote-ref-11)