

I want to make 4 brief points today. First, Lucy Van Pelt from the Peanuts Gang reminds us that there will always be difficult people in our lives. Lucy will continue to bully Linus, humiliate Charlie Brown and pester Schroeder with declarations of love. That's just what you can always expect from Lucy. Jesus was surrounded by difficult people who didn't understand him. The Pharisees and Scribes were self-righteous and legalistic in their interpretation of Jewish religious laws and didn't understand his talk about moving from the letter of the law to the spirit of the law and accused him of being a drunkard and a glutton. The disciples weren't easy either. Peter was impulsive and James and John were continually in a power struggle. Our scripture reminds us that the elder and younger brother are probably never going to appreciate the distinctive personality differences in each other. We are never told how the story ends, but chances are good that in real life the younger brother probably isn't going to ever understand the overresponsible law abiding principles of the older brother and the older brother is never going to understand the fun-loving, free spirited spontaneity of the younger brother. These stories remind us that the world is full of difficult people who are different from us and that isn't going to change. As a psychologist once told me "human personalities are pretty much set and while there is a little wiggle room for improvement, our personalities don't change all that much." Perhaps they pose a difficulty to us because they are stubbornly opinionated and outspoken and that makes them difficult, or maybe someone is difficult because they have a mental illness that distorts their behaviour and that makes them difficult to deal with, maybe they have an addiction or a disability which demands more of your care and attention, maybe they just have a different way of

looking at a situation than we do. Whatever the reason, there will always be people in our lives who pose difficulties for us whether it's a boss, a child, a parent, a spouse, a friend or a stranger we meet along the way.

Point 2. Sometimes we play the role of the difficult person in the life of someone else. From Lucy's perspective, Linus is a baby who can't leave his security blanket behind, Charlie Brown is a weak leader who is never going to get some gumption and stand up for himself and Schroeder is an emotionally distant self-absorbed artist who is never going to give her anything in relationship. To the Pharisees, Jesus was the problem who was misguiding peoples' religiosity. To the Romans, Jesus was a political threat to their Roman empire and to the disciples Jesus was an enigma. To other people in our lives, we are the problem – we don't reason or think or feel or act or respond the way they want us to; we are the ones who are too dominant or too passive, too responsible or not responsible enough, we are the ones causing the problems. As my wise Aunt Daisy always said, "if someone in your life is driving you crazy and you don't like them, chances are very high they feel the same way about you too".

Point 3. Difficult people are in our lives for a purpose. They are wonderful lessons for us to learn. Difficult people teach us amazing gifts. Lucy is right. Linus does need to give up his blankie at some point, Charlie Brown does need to quit being so depressive and passive, and Schroeder needs to have a life beyond the piano and risk entering into human relationship. And Linus and Charlie Brown and Schroeder are all right about Lucy. Lucy needs to quit being so overbearing and bullying and self-righteous. The younger brother needs to grow up and become more responsible and the older brother needs to have some fun. The people who are

playing the role of the difficult person in our lives are trying to teach us invaluable lessons if we let them. They teach us an alternative viewpoint, a truth about ourselves that maybe no one else dares to tell us, they force us to stand up for ourselves and come into our own power, they hold up mirrors to look at ourselves more deeply, they bring out Christ-like qualities in us that we need to develop, they force us to learn empathy, or patience, or compassion, or forgiveness. So next time you encounter a difficult person in your life, ask yourself, what lesson is God trying to teach me through this person? So be grateful for the difficult thorns in our flesh – they are our greatest holy teachers.

And final point, in spite of our human weakness and frailties and personality disorders and distortions, we are all held lovingly in the grace and acceptance of the Holy One who created us. Charles Schultz loves all of his creations – he loves the sensitivity and brilliant insights of Linus, he loves the vulnerability of Charlie Brown, the musical genius of Schroeder, the strength and outspoken truthspeaking of Lucy. He loves and needs every character in the Peanut Gang because they need each other. Out of love, he created and fathered each one of them. The Forgiving Father in our scripture loves both his sons and knows and understands each of their differences and longs for their reconciliation and embrace. And Jesus loves and Peter and James and John and the Pharisees and the Romans and even his enemies. And God loves all of us, this world-wide global mess of humanity and holds us all together longing for us to truly understand and appreciate the diversity and roles that we play for each other. God longs for the Christian to understand the perspective of the Jew and for the Muslim to understand the Hindu. God longs for the women to understand the men and for the young to value the old and for the straight to appreciate the transgendered, for the African to

understand the Australian and the Canadian to understand the American. We are all held in the heart of God and God longs for us to be held in the heart of one another.

And so on this Father's Day, may we appreciate the gift of difficult people in our lives, may we appreciate the men in our lives and what they bring to us, may we give thanks for the good fathers in our lives who provide protection and provision and prepare us for the world.

And may we praise the Father God who longs for reconciliation and acceptance among all his children. So be it. Amen.