

“Parenting by Grace”

John 4:46-54

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Last week I quoted George Buttrick in my sermon. He was the noted pastor of Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City from 1920 until his death in 1980. “The deepest level of love always involves sacrifice,” he wrote. Every parent here this morning knows this statement is true.

So did the royal official that approached Jesus in Cana of Galilee requesting that Jesus heal his son. Actually, he did more than request a miracle from Jesus, he begged for one.

“There was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death. ‘Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders,’ Jesus told him, ‘you will never believe.’ The royal official said, ‘Sir, come down before my child dies.’ Jesus replied, ‘You may go. Your son will live.’ The man took Jesus at his word and departed. While he was still on his way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, ‘The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour.’ Then the father realized this was the exact time at which Jesus said to him, ‘Your son will live.’ So he and all his household believed. This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Jerusalem to Galilee” John 4: 43-54.

This week, I saw this familiar story in a different light. For the first time, my attention was drawn to the royal official as a worried parent of a sick child. All of a sudden, he became real to me, a real human, that is. I know what it is like to worry about a child. You do, too. Let me share with you what this story taught me, or at least reminded me about parenting.

Parenting and pain go together. They did for this father. The thought of his son dying caused immeasurable pain. His heart was breaking.

Sometimes I tell parents of a newborn that their greatest joy and sorrow will revolve around the child they are holding. Their son or daughter will take them to the highest peaks and lowest valleys. Pride and frustration will accompany them along their family journey.

Some of you are in one of those deep valleys and you shared it with me last Sunday after worship. My text was based upon Luke 13:6-9, the parable of the unproductive fig tree. When the landowner told the gardener to cut it down because it was not bearing fruit, he refused to do so and asked for more time to dig around the fig tree and fertilize it.

“Who needs extra attention from you?” I asked. Who do you know that is not living up to their potential and is spiraling out of control? Who will the gospel not let you give up on even if others have? After preaching the sermon, several of you told me about your struggle with a child or grandchild. The pain in your eyes was evident. So was the worry in your voice.

At times parenting and pain go together; **so do parenting and sacrifice**. As a prominent official in Herod's court, this father was an important and busy man. He had lots of responsibility and pride. It appears that he set both of them aside on behalf of his son. At this point in his life, nothing was more important than saving his son's life.

If this powerful leader had to swallow some pride and humble himself before a common carpenter, he would. If this bold request cost him his job or friends, he would let them go. If he had to walk fifteen to twenty miles to find Jesus, he was willing. No price was too high if it would save his son's life.

I have also told new parents that life is no longer about them, and never will be again. As parents, life is about family. Every decision should be made with others in mind. Anything that is not good for the family should be avoided. Anything that will strengthen the family should be pursued. It's that simple.

This is called maturity, wisdom, unselfishness, discipline and love, especially love, because love is willing to do the difficult. The royal official was. We should be, too.

Parenting and help go together, or at least they should. It does take a village to raise a child. Loving parents know this and seek wisdom, guidance, instruction and encouragement from others. Worried parents invite others to pray. Confused parents seek wise counsel. Desperate parents reach out for help, from God and others. The father in our text did.

When struggling parents reach out to us, how should we respond? We need to be the presence of Christ in their lives. What would Jesus do if he were here? What did he do for this distraught father? He helped him, even though there seemed to be some reluctance on his part, just as there was in his first miracle.

"Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe" John 4:48. I get the feeling Jesus thought he was being used, or put upon as we might say. That's understandable and so was his need to vent his frustration. He was surrounded in Jerusalem, and now it appears in Galilee, with people longing to see miracles, not hear about God and be inspired to grow spiritually.

However, he assured this anxious father that his son would live, which gave him the first good night's rest he had probably had in some time. He did not even rush home after speaking with Jesus but waited the next day to return. Only a confident man at peace could do this.

We need to be this approachable and sensitive to others' needs, especially worried parents. We also need to give life and hope as Jesus did. We need to listen to and encourage parents that are struggling with their children. We need to help them carry their heavy loads.

What could you say this week to a burdened parent that might help them find some peace and rest? What could you do that would lighten their load and encourage them? Ask God to show you and prepare you for the opportunity that will surely come in the days ahead.