

“Love is Willing to do the Difficult”

John 4:43-54

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Stone Mountain, Georgia
June 15, 2008

Which child are you most worried about today? How much sleep have you lost? Where have you turned for help?

Would it help you to know that you are not alone? Worrying about children is common, as our text reveals.

A royal official in Capernaum had a sick child that was dying. When he heard that Jesus was in Cana, he made the twenty mile trek to find him and beg him to come to his home to heal his son. Jesus did not go to the man's home, but he did assure him that his son would get well, which he did. According to John, this was Jesus' second miracle, the other occurring in Cana as well when Jesus turned the water into wine.

I am intrigued by this story because it is filled with surprises that lead to penetrating questions. Let me share some of them with you.

I am surprised that a high official in Herod's court asked a common carpenter for help.

There was not a more improbable scene.

This official was an important man that led a busy life. He had an image to protect and honor to uphold. It appears he set these all aside when he begged Jesus for help.

Why did he do this? Love is willing to do the difficult and he loved his son. Even when Jesus rebuked the crowd for following him only because they wanted to be entertained rather than listen and learn, this royal official did not back down. It was as if he said, “I don't know why these people are here, but I have come because I need your help.”

George Buttrick says that the deepest level of love always involves sacrifice. If this is so, and it is, what sacrifices do you need to make to help someone you love? Do you need to set aside status, pride, denial or selfishness?

“One of the most difficult things I have ever done was to go to Al-Anon,” my friend said. He has been the pastor of his church for eleven years and is well known in his community. Going public with his teenage daughter's addictions and eating disorder was extremely painful but necessary. He needed a support group and the skills to help her. Doing so, however, meant that he had to set aside all the things I mentioned a moment ago.

Why did he do it? Love is willing to do the difficult. His daughter's survival depends upon his ability to make sacrifices. Does the survival of one of your family members depend upon you doing the difficult?

Continuing with our story, I am surprised that the royal official did not demand that Jesus return home with him to heal his son. Evidently his son was too sick to travel, so you would expect him to require that Jesus go to his home. He did not. Why?

It appears he trusted Jesus. “The man took Jesus at his word and departed” John 4:50b. He believed Jesus to be reliable, trustworthy and dependable.

Do people trust you like this? Who is depending upon you to keep your word? Be careful what you promise. Words are important and commitments are real. Lives are at stake.

Something else in this story surprises me. It appears this man did not rush home after his encounter with Jesus, but spent the night on the road. Our text tells us that it was the next day that his servants found him to tell him the good news of his son's recovery.

“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.’ ”

I suspect this was one reason John included this story in his book. In his gospel, belief in Jesus and abundant life go together. Hope is born out of faith.

What do you need to believe that would bring you peace? What promises do you need to accept?

Furthermore, what could you say to or do for a burdened parent that would ease their mind, encourage them and help them relax? How could you be the presence of Christ in someone's life this week that would give them hope? What could you do to lighten the heavy load someone is carrying?

Tim Russert's untimely death hit me hard last Friday. He was a great journalist and interviewer. I will miss his voice and insights. A healthy democracy is dependent upon men and women like him.

This weekend, I read again parts of his second book, Wisdom of Our Fathers. It is a compilation of stories people shared with him about their fathers. These stories were inspired by Russert's first book, Big Russ and Me, where he wrote about the relationship he had with his father. I'll share one with you as I conclude.

Brian Baker, from Raliegh, North Carolina, told a story about the day he and his dad attended the 1990 NFC championship game between the New York Giants and the San Francisco 49ers. His dad, Bob, was an avid Giants fan and secured four tickets for the game. Brian figured that his dad would sell two of the tickets and make a substantial amount of money.

As they approached the stadium, over twenty-five people offered to buy his dad's extra tickets, but his dad would not sell them. Brian surmised he was waiting until he got closer to the gate and game time in order to get a higher price. He was wrong.

Brian writes, "As the start of the game approached, we headed for the stadium entrance and my father continued to pass up selling opportunities. I remember thinking that maybe he was getting greedy. But he was looking around and finally saw what he wanted-a father and a young boy that needed tickets. My father explained that he had two extras and was just asking for what he paid for them."

"Are you serious," the man asked. "Yes," my father replied. Now let's go in before we're late for the game."

"I learned something that day," Brian continued, "something about principles and doing what is right. I know today that my father got more enjoyment out of seeing that father and son watch the game right next to us than if he had sold each ticket for a small fortune. In doing so, he taught me a lesson I will never forget."

What could you do for a burdened parent that would ease their mind, encourage them and lighten their load? Think about it this week.