

“A Father’s Love”
Isaiah 66:12-14; Galatians 3:23-29;
Luke 9:37-43

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Once there was a father. He held his newborn son and wondered at who he was. He wondered at who he would be. He wondered at this gift. If you’ve ever held a newborn, they are a wonder. So this father loved his son and slowly the son began to grow, and the father’s hopes were there with this child.

And yet, soon he saw that there was something wrong. The son had a problem. He had these moments when he convulsed in ways that he shouldn’t. He had seizures. We can think about the heartache of the father. And in that time, the father tried to do his best to love his son, to help him grow.

But in his society, having a son that had a problem like that had people pointing at him and saying, “How did you sin? What did you do wrong that this has been visited upon you?” He began to be ostracized by his community. Some even suggested terrible things like taking the son out and leaving him in the wilderness because he must be evil. But the father’s love continued to hold his son, to want him to have a good life.

One day, he heard about a great teacher who was supposed to be able to heal, so he took his son to that teacher’s disciples and asked them to heal his son, but they couldn’t do it. You wonder if there wasn’t some jeering in the crowd and people pointing again and saying, “See how great your sin is!”

And then Jesus comes. It’s always interesting to me what Jesus says first. He says, “You faithless and perverse generation.” What does he mean by that? He goes on to heal the father’s son, but what does he mean in that moment?

In the same story in Mark, the disciples ask Jesus, “Why couldn’t we heal the son?” Jesus says, “This kind takes much prayer.” He doesn’t say, “It’s because you are bad people and you couldn’t do it.” He said, “This is a hard one.” So when he calls the generation faithless and perverse, he’s not saying this isn’t hard. What *is* he saying? I’m always confused by what he’s saying here.

I begin to wonder if it’s not about what they’ve done to the father—that ostracism, that inability to accept that because the father has a son who is different that he should be loved rather than ostracized. When one was healed in Palestine at that time, it wasn’t just about physical healing. They didn’t have the sense that this was an epileptic seizure that was just an abnormality. They didn’t have a sense of the biology. They just pointed to it as evil, different, wrong.

Jesus suggests, I think, that they were wrong. There was a father’s love to pay attention to. It feels to me like what Jesus does here is pay attention to a father’s love for his child. I don’t think it’s that he doesn’t care for the child, but the father is the one here who has come to Jesus. Perhaps Jesus knows something about a father’s love.

It's interesting to me that when we begin to think about God, that God doesn't mind at all being compared to a parent. In the Isaiah passage, God is very willing to be compared to a mother and have a mother's love, a compassion. Jesus often talks about God as Father. God doesn't mind being compared to a father. In fact, God seems to want us to think about what it means to be a good parent and compare that to who God is—the good parent, the good father, the good mother. So Jesus knows something about a father's love.

Jesus knows something about the love of a father who so loved the world that he sent his son. We think about Jesus encountering that father who is ostracized by his community, a son who is pointed at as evil. He doesn't point at the father and say, "This is what you've done wrong, and here's how you need to change it so your son can be well." He points instead at the crowd and says, "You've got it wrong."

It's interesting what Paul recognizes when he begins to talk about us as children of God. When it says God so loved the world, it means he loves all of us. He loves us whether we've got all kinds of barriers in between us or not. He loves us no matter who we are. It's not a love that is earned. It's not a love given because we are a particular person or we've done a particular thing or we've got a particular gift. The father's love is pure gift. It's a gift of grace.

So he comes to us to give us that grace and as we accept it, as we acknowledge it, as we recognize that it is in that love that we are guided into new life, he gives us some clues about how we should live forward. God loves all of us, and yet we struggle to hear the call to love one another. We struggle to love everyone, and yet we all want to accept God's love. We all know that we've struggled with our own stuff. I certainly know I'm not perfect. I don't feel like I deserve God's love. It's a gift, and it is because of that gift that we get called, we get the opportunity to share that love.

It feels to me like if God loves us, it is incumbent upon us to share that love and if we follow Jesus' example, he sure didn't care what the problem was that came to him, he loved those people. His approach to dealing with our problems was to bring us love and healing. It seems so different than the world we live in which seems to think that violence is so often the answer. We've received grace, and grace is what we are called to share. It's a different way.

Look how Jesus encountered a very violent and angry situation in society. He loved them, healed them, gave his life for them and for us. As we accept the gift of grace that we've been given, we have to recognize what Paul says: that we are God's children, and when we are God's family it's not about whether we're Jew or Greek, whether we're slave or free, whether we're male or female. He's saying it doesn't matter if you're born here or there, what group you're part of. God doesn't make that kind of distinction. It doesn't matter whether you've got low economic status or high economic status. It doesn't matter whether you've got a lot of power or a little power. It doesn't matter whether you're male or female. We could probably go on to say it doesn't matter whether you're diseased or not diseased, or whatever kind of problem we have or whatever kinds of ways we can create an "other." He loves us all and invites us to love one another.

Jesus doesn't make it easy. In Matthew 5:43-48, he says, "Don't just love your friends. Love your enemies." It often feels to me like it's all pie-in-the-sky stuff, and what I realize in my daily life is that it's not an easy thing to do to figure out how to care for those that don't care for me, to figure out how to care for those I just don't understand or even don't like. What is clear to me is that I've been given grace and that I'm called to give that grace, to forego violence, to grieve with those who grieve. We can celebrate with those who celebrate. We know what it is to care and to share the grace because we know a Father's love. Amen.