

Grace, Blessings & Faithfulness      2022  
Mark 9:33-37, 10:13-16    Galatians 3:23-29

Mark 9:33-37, 10:13-16 (New Revised Standard Version)

Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me." People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Galatians 3:23-29 (New Revised Standard Version)

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

One night a wife found her husband standing over their baby's crib. Silently she watched him. As he stood looking down at the sleeping infant, she saw on his face a mixture of emotions; disbelief, doubt, delight, amazement, enchantment and skepticism.

Touched by this unusual display and the deep emotions it aroused, with eyes glistening she slipped her arm around her husband, and whispered, "A penny for your thoughts, dear."

"It's amazing", he replied. "I just don't see how anybody can manufacture and sell a crib like that for only \$44.50."

Truly, may this be a most happy & blessed Father's Day for all of you,  
for so often it's been my joy to see wonderful examples  
of faithful and godly Christian fathers in this church.

This day we gratefully celebrate & honor the steadfast faithfulness  
of our Heavenly Father, our biological fathers who gave us life,  
and those many others who provide healthy masculine role models.

On this Father's Day let us celebrate and honor faithful fathers --

all those men who serve so well in that role of blessing children,  
all who give of themselves on the behalf of a child,  
regardless of whether or not they share the same DNA.

Today we honor all who actually do the tasks of nurture & admonition,  
including stepfathers, uncles, grandfathers, neighbors,

scoutmasters, coaches, teachers and many other mentors,  
all those who provide spiritual guidance & example,  
all who are such a blessing to our dear children.

One of the things that I most appreciate about my own father,  
is that he always demonstrated his love & respect for my mother.

Kathy should to be grateful for the example my dad lived,  
for as it turns out, boys learn healthy love and respect for women,  
**primarily from watching their father's behavior and attitude.**

The way they see their dad treat his wife, their mother,  
is critical in setting the patterns of their behavior,  
in influencing how they will choose to treat women.

Daughters learn what to expect and demand from men from their dad,  
and later on, the man they select to be their husband,  
will be significantly influenced by what they see,  
by the relationship patterns set by their father.

So dads, if you want your daughters and sons to have happy marriages,  
then make sure your children can observe,  
that you do love and respect their mother.

Similarly,  
children are also influenced by our active participation in church.  
**The question is, what legacy will we leave behind for our children?**

Just an inheritance of material things, or a real walk with God?  
Is your chief concern more over your children's grades in school,  
or their spiritual nurture and their faith development?  
From the life-priorities and values that you have actually modeled,  
how important would your children say it is to live a life of faith?

Surely a child is the very pinnacle of God marvelous creation,  
and consider, that God trusts and allows **us** to influence them,  
granting to **us**, to make a real difference in a child's life.

Therefore, God has called us to teach and show them what we believe,  
to pass on our faith, to instill worthy values and character,  
to pass along integrity down through the coming generations,  
and in a sense to let them **stand upon our shoulders.**

The question at hand is fatherly influence and responsibility,  
which is far more than just a Hallmark greeting card occasion.

And when I think of true, faithful and godly fatherhood, I am reminded  
of a wonderful painting, it's of a young child's bedroom at night.

There is the soft glow of moonlight streaming in through a window  
onto the child's face sleeping peacefully and secure  
looking content with a sense of blessed well-being,  
as you can see and feel that all is right with that child's world.

And kneeling at the foot of the bed there is a man, the father,  
his head bowed down and his eyes closed, obviously  
a faithful, loving and godly man in earnest fervent prayer.

**The painting conveys a powerful sense of his strength,**

a physical protector present as a loving guide to that child,  
with a determination to provide a solid foundation  
upon which to build a meaningful and useful life.

**There is also a powerful sense of his vulnerability,**

this father's visible submission under the call & authority of God,  
in humble gratitude, supplication and intercession  
praying on behalf of that precious and much beloved child.

Through the brush strokes of that painting,  
the artist provides a powerful portrayal of biblical fatherhood,  
as ordained by our God who created us, and who loves us.  
It's a picture of masculine humility and trust before God,  
not standing upon his own strength and understanding,  
but a love so deep as to plead for his child's welfare.

It is a very moving and compelling snapshot of fatherhood -  
a faithful man seeking God's blessings in the life of his child,  
perhaps much like the **Mark 10** passage in which  
parents were to bringing their children  
for Jesus to hold them and to bless them.

At this point in his ministry,  
Jesus was often overwhelmed by the crowds of people in need,  
teaching, healing and important leaders asking questions...

... and dealing with children, culturally considered insignificant,  
was way down on the *importance scale* for the disciples.

Clearly, the disciples weren't paying attention earlier, vs. 35-37

Jesus sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.

Continuing to the next chapter, vs. 13~16

People were bringing little children ... and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant ... And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

**Jesus was indignant, which is a very strong word,**

**but apparently, blessing the children ranked rather high  
among the ministerial tasks Jesus came to accomplish...  
... which was also our task in baptizing Zayvion this morning.**

And what a bold and audacious deed and statement his baptism is,  
for us to baptize our children, and our children's children,  
before they have even chosen to follow Jesus,  
or can even understand what is really going on.

**But what better than the baptism of an infant or child to symbolize  
and bear witness to the truth that God's love lays claim to us,  
even before we have knowledge or can respond with any faith?**

Today, we dared to proclaim and declare God's love for Zayvion.  
We claimed the richness of God's promises on his behalf,  
and we have vowed before God and before each other,  
that we will help him discover and grow in that truth.

That is, that we will provide an environment for grace & growth,  
a home – a church – an active & welcoming community of faith,  
**so that someday, he can claim God's grace for himself.**  
And if we are faithful in the vows we promised today,  
then someday if asked, “who are you?”, Zayvion will reply,  
**"I am one, who is loved, blessed and cherished by God."**

The theology and faith that supports that belief  
is that long before we have made any moves toward God,  
the Lord has already chosen to love us and to extend grace.

As we are assured in Jeremiah 1:5

**"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I set you apart to love and cherish..."**

**That is also the truth behind Paul's teaching about God's grace.**

The Apostle Paul was the one who began the church in Galatia.  
Then he moved on to spread the Gospel message to other places.

But sometime after the Apostle left  
some very impressive Jewish Christians came from Jerusalem,  
who convinced these new Christians in Galatia,  
that Paul's teaching had been incomplete, deficient.

They insisted that Christians should still live and practice  
all of the laws, rules, rituals and traditions of Judaism ...  
**... and that there was more to being a good Christian**  
**than just receiving God's grace through Jesus Christ...**  
**... and that some were more worthy and loved by God than others...**

... a move which Paul absolutely, vehemently and fervently opposed,  
which **went back to Paul's own experience of becoming a Christian.**

Paul was raised as a meticulous Law and ritual abiding Jew,  
and he began his faith journey by 'doing religion well'  
as a very strict, a law and tradition driven Pharisee.

But his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus showed him,  
that **salvation is entirely a gracious gift from God,**  
accomplished entirely through Jesus Christ alone,  
and our best efforts don't and can't earn any of it...  
**... and there's no greater life-changing truth that we can ever know.**

Paul recognized that as soon as you add more requirements, more rules  
**you are denying the sufficiency of the sacrifice of Jesus,**  
because that is to say that **you need something more than grace...**

... and either we're saved by grace through Christ alone, or we are not,  
and if you say that something more than grace is required,  
**that means the sacrifice of Jesus really wasn't enough.**  
**So, grace plus anything --- is no longer truly grace.**

And **since we are all saved entirely by God's healing grace alone,**  
**and not by our external adherence to religious law and ritual,**  
& since all of us are **all equally sinners healed & saved by grace,**  
any further distinction between Jew and gentile, young or old,  
male or female, wealthy or poor, have been **made irrelevant...**

**... for in fact, no human distinction exists or applies any more**

**to those who have been adopted into God's family, the Church.**

As Paul explains in our text, vs. 26-28

For in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; **for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.**

In Christ, **God only sees sinners who are loved & have been forgiven.**

Not Jews or Greeks, not slaves or free, not male or female,  
**but all uniquely loved, adopted as the Children of God...**

**... and those who focus on rules and divisions are failing to grasp  
the radical nature of what it means to be one, clothed in Christ,  
allowing ourselves to be loved, blessed and to be graced by God.**

And since receiving grace from God does lead to a change of heart,  
with a that change of heart, **external behavior will follow.**  
So, our faith and good deeds are not our accomplishment,  
but are our response to God's prior gift and blessing of grace.

Our ethics, our moral standards are not based upon some external Law,  
but are guided by grace and the Holy Spirit present within us,  
basing our decisions and choices on 3 important questions:

- 1<sup>st</sup> does it bring me closer to God, or does it hinder my walk of faith?**
- 2<sup>nd</sup> does it serve to further the love of God and neighbor, or not?**
- 3<sup>rd</sup> what am I doing with the blessings that God has entrusted to me?**

The Christian life is never about simply obeying the rules.

It's not about believing all the right doctrines,  
or even fully understanding Scripture and theology...

**... but in response, we seek to know and love and obey and serve God,  
by walking in a faithful and personal relationship with Christ,  
and it is from that relationship and indwelling Spirit  
that we can live out our lives in faithful obedience.**

God's grace is about freeing us to live the blessings God intends,  
liberating us from the sins of our past, corruptions of culture,  
and our own sense of failure, unhealthy brokenness or despair.

It's doesn't mean free to follow any impulse, selfish desire or whim,  
but it's freedom to grow into **our best self** as God created us to be.

As the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 15:13, 5-6 (*The Message*)

May the God of hope fill you up with joy, fill you up with peace, so that your believing lives, filled with the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, will brim over with hope! May our dependably steady and warmly personal God develop maturity in you so that you get along with each other as well as Jesus gets along with us all. Then we'll be a choir—not our voices only, but our very lives singing in harmony in a stunning anthem to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!