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[All Scripture quotations are from the NIV, unless otherwise noted.]

John 4:43-54

A Boy and His Dad

Sometimes being a parent is really hard. You want all that is good for your child, but in the world your child will encounter much that is not good. You cannot shelter your child from all storms. You cannot deliver your child from all troubles. There is a whole lot that you have no power to control or fix. There will be times when the shape of your child's next day will be entirely uncertain. There may be times when you can't even be certain that your child's next day will come.

Yesterday was the last day on this earth for the son of a good friend. He was in his early 40s. He had struggled for so long. His mother was with him at the end, loving him as always, and still tragically unable to rescue him. For years the shape of his next day was uncertain. Now he has no more next days. Any parent can tell you, it's not supposed to happen that way. Parents are not supposed to sit at the bedsides of their dying children. And yet it happens. The brokenness of this world is undeniable.

There's a word for parents in this account in John chapter 4 about the royal official and his son. Still, just as the first sign--when Jesus turned water into wine--is not only (and not even primarily) about weddings and marriages, the second sign--when Jesus healed the sick boy from a distance--is not only (and not even primarily) about parents and children.

John says that the significance of the signs is that they reveal Jesus' glory and lead his followers to trust in him.

The first sign took place in Cana when Jesus turned the water into wine. The party was winding down. Then Jesus spoke a few quiet words of command, and suddenly the best wine ever was available in great abundance and the wedding celebration was back in full swing. It was an event that pointed beyond itself to something else, an event that revealed Jesus' glory and led his disciples to trust in him.

The wedding at Cana is not a sign that life is a never-ending party. It's a sign that even when we come to the end of our resources...when we have nothing left...when the music has faded and nobody feels like

dancing...Jesus can speak into the emptiness and the ordinariness and do something extraordinary.

It's a sign that the day of the Lord proclaimed by the prophets is at hand--the day that God himself would intervene in creation to bring redemption and restoration; to set captives free, bring sight to the blind, and deliver the oppressed; to make whole what is broken and make right what is wrong; to bring life and hope and purpose. It's a sign that Jesus is the one sent by God to bring the day of the Lord. It's a sign that Jesus can be trusted.

Two chapters later, John writes about a second sign...an event that points beyond itself to something else, an event that reveals Jesus' glory and invites his followers to trust in him.

After the wedding, Jesus traveled to other places, but then, some weeks later, he returned to Cana. Cana was a little town in Galilee. Capernaum was a larger town about 15-20 miles away.

There was a certain royal official that lived in Capernaum with his family. Apparently, he worked in the administration of Herod Antipas, who ruled Galilee under the Romans. This royal official had position. He had income. He had education. He had connections. If anybody had access to state-of-the art healthcare, he did.

This royal official's son was sick--really sick--so sick that he was close to death. We don't know if he was a baby or a little boy or a teenager. We don't know how long he was sick or why he was sick. We know that he was dying. And we know that his dad couldn't do anything to make him better. His position, his income, his education, his connections--in the face of the boy's illness, they didn't matter.

This father was getting desperate. In the face of his son's illness, it didn't matter if he was a royal official or a beggar. He was powerless. He was helpless. His son was dying, and he could not do anything about it. He didn't know anybody who could do anything about it. He was hoping maybe Jesus could do something about it. He traveled to Cana, and he begged Jesus to come to Capernaum.

This father would have done anything, given anything, if there was a chance it would have helped his son. Jesus did not ask for anything. No quid pro quo. No bargaining required.

Jesus spoke a quiet word of assurance to this worried father, and some 20 miles away a fever broke and a sick boy was no longer sick.

This healing story not a sign that we will never have to deal with illness and death, and it is not a sign that sick children will always be made well. It's a sign that even when we're helpless and desperate...when there's nothing we can do to change our circumstances...when the fragility of life is staring us in the face and we can do nothing but stare back...Jesus can speak into the tragedy of our circumstances and the vulnerability of our lives and do something extraordinary.

It's a sign that the day of the Lord proclaimed by the prophets is at hand--the day that God himself would intervene in creation to bring redemption and restoration; to set captives free, bring sight to the blind, and deliver the oppressed; to make whole what is broken and make right what is wrong; to bring life and hope and purpose. It's a sign that Jesus is the one sent by God to bring the day of the Lord. It's a sign that Jesus can be trusted.

This story is not about how to get God to do what you want him to do when you want him to do it. The royal official from Capernaum did not do something right that my friend from Ann Arbor did wrong. They both cried out in desperation. I believe with all my heart that God heard both their cries. By physically healing the son in Capernaum, Jesus revealed his glory and led his followers to trust in him just a bit more deeply.

The son in Ann Arbor was not physically healed. I don't know why. God often reveals himself. God seldom explains himself. I trust that Jesus is still working--in my friend and in others--to reveal his glory and lead his followers to trust in him just a bit more deeply.

When you are a parent, you want to protect your child and provide for your child and heal your child and rescue your child from hurt. Sometimes you can't. Sometimes all you can do is pray and wait. You would do anything, give anything, if it would help your child. But there is no quid pro quo. No bargaining is required. Sometimes all you can do is pray and wait. Sometimes for a day. Sometimes for a month. Sometimes for years.

Sometimes it's because your child is sick. Sometimes it's because your child is in a destructive relationship or addicted or floundering in indecision. Sometimes it's because someone else is making life-altering decisions for your child. Sometimes it's because your child is making bad decisions. Sometimes you just know that your child will be reaping the consequences of those decisions for a long, long time to come. And you can't fix it.

Sometimes your child has rejected God. Sometimes your child is simply indifferent to God. You know what they have not yet realized: walking through life without God is walking on empty, and facing death without God is downright tragic.

Sometimes, as difficult as it is, all you can do is pray and wait.

In this account in John 4, the child was healed instantaneously from a distance. It doesn't always work that way.

God is not a vending machine. He is sovereign over the universe. Nothing we do causes him to respond in a mechanical way. Everything we do impacts our relationship with him. Based on his sovereignty and his plan, his faithfulness and his love, his freedom and his respect for our freedom, he acts to reveal his glory and lead his followers to trust him more fully.

Even when your child is so lost in the darkness that all seems hopeless, don't give up. Even when your faith is weak, don't give up. Even when it seems like Jesus is not listening, don't give up. Keep praying. Keep crying out. Maybe you will get to see the restoration God has planned. Maybe not. Either way, keep praying. God is always doing more than we can see.

I'm pretty sure that when he was little, Peter's mother prayed for him to grow up to be successful in the family business of fishing. She did not know God was going to make him a fisher of men. She did not know that he would, eventually, die for his Lord.

Being a parent is hard. It's hard when a child is wandering away from the Lord. And it's hard when a child is walking faithfully the path God has set.

The healing of the boy in Capernaum is a sign that, no matter what happens, illness, brokenness, and death do not have the last word; God does. Life brings us face to face with raging storms, unimaginable troubles, and a whole lot that we cannot control or fix. In the midst of it all, Jesus deserves our trust, because he is the one sent by God to bring the day of the Lord--to bring redemption and restoration; to set captives free, bring sight to the blind, and deliver the oppressed; to make whole what is broken and make right what is wrong; to bring life and hope and purpose.