

So Loved

Sermon, March 11, 2018

Picture in your mind one of the most generous, loving parents you have ever met. What qualities does that person possess that makes them such an example of unselfish parenting? Is it because they let their children do whatever they want? Probably not. Is their generosity shown by giving their children everything they want? Again, probably not. What then, makes them such generous examples in your mind? Is it because they always feed their children's friends when they suspect that their parents are not home to feed them, or they are home, but do not cook? My childhood friend Kim ate with me more times than I can count because my mom knew that her mom was ill and would not have made a lunch for her on days we were not in school. So Kim ate lunch with me. Is it because that mom or dad was always thinking about ways to make the lives of other parents, who did not have what they have, easier? Dianne's dad and step-mother used to make sure this one little girl always had whatever she needed for

school, had a special gift on her birthday or that she had presents at Christmas. Perhaps some parents knew that there was still a lot of wear left in clothes after the youngest in the family had grown out of their clothes and would bring those to other parents whose children were younger and not able to provide new clothes for every child when they needed them. I have a friend whose son is an opiate addict. If you have had addiction in your family, you know that you are not always the best one to help the addict move toward recovery. We usually cannot help those closest to us. Another recovering addict can do more for that loved one than we could ever do. My friend, knowing this, though she supports her son in his efforts at recovery, has begun a ministry to homeless people in Boston. This is her way of reaching out to others who may be suffering from addiction and doing for someone else's child that which she cannot do for her own son. All of these examples show the generosity of parents who love their own children and helps other parents support their children. I am sure all of us know someone like this – perhaps even our own parents.

These people tend to think of the needs of their children and of others before thinking of themselves. Let me tell you a story:

This love story began in Winchester, Mass., 43 years ago, when Rick was strangled by the umbilical cord during birth, leaving him brain-damaged and unable to control his limbs.

"He'll be a vegetable the rest of his life," his father, Dick Hoyt says doctors told him and his wife, Judy, when Rick was nine months old. "Put him in an institution."

But the Hoyts weren't buying it. When Rick was 11 they took him to the engineering department at Tufts University and asked if there was anything to help the boy communicate. "No way," Dick says he was told. "There's nothing going on in his brain."

"Tell him a joke," Dick countered. They did. Rick laughed. Turns out a lot was going on in his brain.

Rigged up with a computer that allowed him to control the cursor by touching a switch with the side of his head, Rick was finally able to communicate. First words? "Go Bruins!" And after a high school classmate was paralyzed in an accident and the school organized a charity run for him, Rick pecked out, "Dad, I want to do that."

Yeah, right. How was Dick, a self-described "porker" who never ran more than a mile at a time, going to push his son five miles? Still, he tried. "Then it was me who was handicapped," Dick says. "I was sore for two weeks."

That day changed Rick's life. "Dad," he typed, "when we were running, it felt like I wasn't disabled anymore!"

And that sentence changed Dick's life. He became obsessed with giving Rick that feeling as often as he could. **H**e got into such good shape that he and Rick were ready to try the 1979 Boston Marathon.

"No way," Dick was told by a race official. The Hoyts weren't quite a single runner, and they weren't quite a wheelchair competitor. For a few years Dick and Rick just joined the massive field and ran anyway. Then they found a way to get into the race officially: In 1983 they ran another marathon so fast they made the qualifying time for Boston the following year.

Then somebody said, "Hey, Dick, why not a triathlon?"

Now they've done 212 triathlons, including four grueling 15-hour Ironmans in Hawaii. It must be a buzzkill to be a 25-year-old stud getting passed by an old guy towing a grown man in a dinghy, don't you think?

This year, at ages 65 and 43, Dick and Rick finished their 24th Boston Marathon, in 5,083rd place out of more than 20,000 starters. Their best time? Two hours, 40 minutes in 1992 – only 35 minutes off the world record, which, in case you don't keep track of these things, happens to be held by a guy who was not pushing another man in a wheelchair at the time.

"No question about it," Rick types. "My dad is the Father of the Century."

And Dick got something else out of all this too. Two years ago he had a mild heart attack during a race. Doctors found that one of his arteries was 95% clogged. "If you hadn't been in such great shape," one doctor told him, "you probably would've died 15 years ago."

So, in a way, Dick and Rick saved each other's life.

They give speeches around the country and compete in some backbreaking race every weekend, including this Father's Day.

That night, Rick will buy his dad dinner, but the thing he really wants to give him is a gift he can never buy. "The thing I'd most like," Rick types, "is that my dad sit in the chair and I push him once."

And what has Rick done for his father? Not much – except save his life!

Sports Illustrated Issue date: June 20, 2005, p. 88

Isn't that what God did when he sent Jesus to earth? The Trinity – One God with three divine persons – God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit - is an impossible mystery to explain. The Bible does not even explain it well to us. Today, in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, Paul describes God's love for us as if God is sending someone separate from God's self to earth – Jesus. It is as if they are two separate individuals, yet our faith tells us they are part of the Triune God. Boggles the mind doesn't it? We could each use mother or father as an example...My dad worked in a paper mill, was a volunteer firefighter and my father – the same person did three things just like God, right? Not really, because that analogy of the Trinity limps badly – my dad was a human being who wore many hats. God is always the Creator, The Redeemer and the Sanctifier – all the time, no matter what. Since we have such difficulty comprehending this reality of God, the writers of Scripture - also human, with the same puzzle about the Trinity –

breaks each down for us to help us to understand the role each person in God plays.

God so loved us that God sent the Son, Jesus to earth to make it possible for us to gain heaven – as a pure gift – which we do nothing to deserve. In Ephesians today, Paul tells us: “But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,⁷ so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” By grace we have been saved! By grace! And where does that grace come from? Paul says it comes from God. It reminds me of another text from John 3:16 with which we are all very familiar– “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” In human term this is amazing! It is the greatest gift God could have given to us! We are SO LOVED by

God that God sends us the Son! God's SON! Amazing! It is actually beyond what human language can express and the human heart can understand. I do not to reduce God with human qualities - but indulge me for a moment. The only thing I can equate this action of God to – is loss. A parent who loses a child is the only one who can truly imagine what God did for us. Sending Jesus to earth, was like sending Godself to earth. It was a radical expression of love – we are SO LOVED by God, that God sent Jesus away from heaven so WE would have a place in God's kingdom! Jesus' human death on the cross was so difficult for his followers after all he had taught them, after all the time they had spent together, after they had turned themselves over to him to spread his Gospel. Yet, Jesus Death on the cross meant he would return to God. Yet, since the Trinity is one God with Three Divine Persons, had they ever really been separated? There is that mystery again that escapes our ability to comprehend. One thing is for sure – Jesus was here and gave us the Gospel to share with others.

We can compare God with the most generous of human parents we know – but even that pales in light of what Jesus has done for us. We cannot grasp that kind of sacrifice, except to compare the sacrifice of the soldier who dies in combat to win our freedom. Or a teacher who takes a bullet to save a child in a school shooting. That is the closest we can come.

If these mysteries are so hard to comprehend, then the love of God for us is enormous! Greater than any love we have ever known! God so loved us that he sent Jesus to wipe us clean of our sins, so that we can live out eternity with God!! Let us reflect on this reality this week.

I believe if each of us spends time contemplating God's love for us even a few minutes every day, it would have a life altering effect upon us! It would put the things we argue about into perspective. It would help us to listen more to each other – not necessarily agree, but consider that there may be another way to look at violence that takes the lives of innocents, another way to see the

struggle of people who live or look differently than we do, to realize that things that some people call entitlements are needed by the very people who have paid into the system for retirement, that my brother or sister in need could be my next door neighbor or the person sitting in the pew in front of or behind me, that children have a right to play outside and feel safe and that parents should feel safe letting them do that, that not all illegal immigrants are drug dealers and murderers, that the young person you pass on the street isn't someone to fear because they have a hoodie on, but someone who might be hungry, scared or confused. If we all spent a little time each day reflecting on how much God loves us, maybe we too could become more loving and reach out to someone in need. God so loved us that Jesus was sent to lead us to our heavenly home. This Lent as we consider our spiritual practices to draw closer to God, perhaps our reflection on God's great love can impact that new, deeper relationship with the God of generosity and Covenant!