

Homesickness That Heals

Psalm 116:12-19
Romans 5:1-8

June 18, 2017
Faith Community

Back when my son David was three or four years old, he had a tricycle that he loved to ride. It was a "Big Wheel," and being a typical kid, he wanted to go as fast as he could. One day our family went for a walk in our little Pennsylvania town. Actually, my wife, daughter and I walked and David, for his part, rode his Big Wheel.

We were nearing the end of our journey, so he wanted one last push, a big push, which my wife was more than happy to oblige. Big push accomplished, David sped off into glory, only to encounter a certain road hazard along the way. It was a divot in the sidewalk, but big enough to stop a Big Wheel dead in its tracks.

There are certain laws of physics that prevail pretty much everywhere, and in this case the law of the flying boy was applied mercilessly.

The Big Wheel stopped, but David kept right on going. He was launched over the handlebars and landed splat on the sidewalk in front of him, with his chin absorbing most of the impact.

Dear old dad gathered up this screaming mass of childhood agony, got him in the house and laid him on the floor for inspection. Instantly my wife and I knew that the gaping hole in his chin would need more than A & D Ointment, a Band-Aid and a kiss to make it better.

So off to the emergency room we went. Upon arrival, David was strapped into one of those restraining devices for small children, which in his case did precious little good. It took the biggest, toughest, most hardened veteran of the E. R. wars, plus two nurses, plus the aforementioned dear old dad, to keep the boy still enough so the doctor could sew in the twelve stitches that were required to close the hole in his chin. Little David is now 31-year-old big David, but he still has a scar to remind him of that dark day.

Friends, I tell you that story because I believe it was on that day that I became a father. Now I was in the delivery room when both of my kids were born. I changed my share of diapers, rejoiced when the teeth started coming in, marveled at their first words, cheered at their first steps, but all that was preparatory stuff for the day of the flying boy.

I would've given anything to take his pain and fear away. I heard every cry, watched every injection and stitch, and shed tears of my own in the process. I also learned something important.

When you become a parent, you can be hurt in ways you never dreamed of back in the day when there were no tiny creatures holding your heart hostage. And it's a price you willingly pay every time. On that day in the E. R. all pretense was laid aside. Matters of personal image, professional success or my standing in the community receded to the rightful realm of trivialities. Nothing mattered more than getting my boy well.

I wanted to take his place on that table.

The story of faith tells us that that's what God did on our behalf.

We think if we work hard enough or live a good life or pay our bills on time we'll make it into God's good graces. It doesn't work that way.

Left to ourselves we can never do enough or be good enough. The only hope is for God to make the first move, and that's exactly what happened. God came to live among us in the person of Jesus.

I love how the senior pastor of my home church used to put it whenever we had communion: "The Old Testament declares that without the shedding of blood there's no remission of sin. The New Testament triumphantly replies, the shed blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all unrighteousness."

And friends, I want you to be homesick for this. When you don't worship regularly, my hope for you will be that you'll know something is wrong, something's missing. And the only thing that'll take that away is for you to worship. On your own in private devotions, here together regularly, and in other faith communities when you're away from here. That's why one of the questions we ask new members is, "Will you seek out the fellowship of the church wherever you may be?"

Calvin Trillin wrote a wonderful tribute to his late wife entitled, About Alice. Near the end of it he writes of her volunteer work at a camp for terminally ill children. She befriended a girl, whom she described as a magical child who was desperately ill but courageous and optimistic

nevertheless. One day while the girl was playing, Alice saw a letter the girl's parents had sent her. She couldn't resist reading the first few lines: "If God had given us all the children in the world to choose from, we would only have chosen you." She showed it to another counselor, saying, "Quick. Read this. It's the secret of life."¹

It's also the faith that you and I proclaim. God loves you like that. So much does he love you that he gave his body and his blood to guarantee a place at the table for you. And I want you to be homesick for that, so much so that you cannot let much time pass between worship experiences, and each one will remind you of the ultimate home not made by human hands.

Or, as St. Augustine wrote sixteen hundred years ago, "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you."

¹ Mark Ralls, "Living by the Word: Mindful" [The Christian Century](#), May 15, 2007, p. 17.