A Worried Parent (Part 2)

After the two days he left for Galilee. (Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.) When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, for they also had been there.

Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.

“Unless you people see signs and wonders,” Jesus told him, “you will never believe.”

The royal official said, “Sir, come down before my child dies.”

“Go,” Jesus replied, “your son will live.”

The man took Jesus at his word and departed. While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, “Yesterday, at one in the afternoon, the fever left him.”

Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” So he and his whole household believed.

This was the second sign Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee.

Entering into Scripture: A Meditation on the Royal Official

“Mommy, am I dying?” Where did the question come from — the depths of his illness, or in response to the muffled voices just outside his room? Only a minute ago, the doctor told us there was nothing more he could do for our son. It has been a month-long frantic search for solutions, options, treatments — anything to help our son. Nothing has worked, and even the best physicians in the region have failed to offer a diagnosis or any real treatment.

No one knows a child’s body better than his parents. My wife and I have watched our son slowly withering away before our eyes. He asks the one question that neither of us could voice — are we losing our son? Is he dying? She offers some comforting words while I turn away to hide the tears that stream down my face.

He seems so brave, so courageous; belying his crumbling frame. I am plunged into a depth of despair I could never imagine — a narrowing grief that stretches minutes to weeks and weeks to years. Nothing is more unbearable than to watch a child suffer, powerless to help. Parents are supposed to be there for their kids. My heart
aches and I am racked with guilt. I am failing as a father and as a husband. I don’t know where my wife’s strength comes from. She keeps vigil by his bed as I rise to step out of his room. I say nothing.

Life as a royal official is filled with rank and privilege, but all that seems so hollow now. Because of my high standing we can summons the best, and the best can do nothing. I feel helpless. My son is dying. Our son is dying. And there is not a damn thing I can do about it. I attempt to muster a prayer, but no words form. Only an aching, empty anguish of a dad watching his son die – watching his wife cling to the last thread of hope in the face of utter darkness. There is no balm for that.

Stepping into the courtyard our servant tells us that he has heard that the One called Jesus is on His way back to Galilee. I have heard about what He did at the wedding in Cana, and instantly perk up. “Where is He going,” I asked. I am told that no one knows. Immediately I dispatch our courier to run ahead and get word of His whereabouts. I must go to Him. I must go at once.

I hastily arrange to go, as soon as I learn where He is. Our driver readies the chariot and hitches-up so we are ready to depart as soon as we know. It is the better part of day before word comes back, painful moments of grief as I am increasingly convinced time is not on our side. The hours pass with agonizing deliberateness. When word of His whereabouts does finally arrive, it is early evening. The good news: Jesus is going to Cana, not far from here. The bad news: we have lost another day. With the late hour, we won’t leave till morning. My anxiety ratchets up yet another notch – if that were possible.

We unhitch the horses and arrange to leave at first light. I go inside and relieve my wife of her vigil. I will not be able to sleep anyway, and she will need some rest to be with our son while I am away. Through the watches of the night I trace his features, my eyes taking in each contour of his face, his chin, his cheek bones. The dark of this night cannot hide his sunken eyes. He seems so peaceful now. So frail.

It is still dark when I awake my wife in the wee hours of morning. She had barely slept. As she resumes our vigil, I prepare to leave. My driver and I go at first light. Cana is about eighteen miles from our home in Capernaum. The route travels around the Sea of Galilee counter-clockwise through Magdala heading south to about the nine-o’clock position, then turns right and ascends into the heights. One of the privileges of being a royal official is that I can go by chariot. It is faster than walking, although a good runner can beat a skilled charioteer over rough terrain. There are many good highways through Judea, but the road to Cana is not one of them.

We have heard about Him, Jesus, that is. He is a man of great wisdom and stories of various miraculous healings have been circulating with increasing frequency. I have never seen Him myself, but I believe He is a man sent from God – no one could do the things He has done if God were not with Him. I only need Him to come to Capernaum and see my son – and he will live.

The route is slow and hazardous, and it takes a great deal of attention to steady the chariot along the way. We go as fast as we can, and that is painfully slow. Morning gives way to a scorching-hot day. The sky is blue. The sun is bright. There is little to no breeze. The road offers no shade. There is not even a passing cloud for relief. The scent of horse sweat is oddly comforting to me as we make our way. It is a foil to my growing anxiety – what if we don’t make it in time?

We arrive in Cana at mid-day. Immediately I jumped off the chariot, leaving it to my attendant, and go running in search of Jesus. I find Him at last, teaching in the square. There is a large crowd around the place where Jesus is seated, and I strain to get a look of Him through the crowd, to no avail. I begin to weave my way through the crowd, pushing my way to the front as respectfully as possible, but also with urgency. I have no time to waste.
Breaking through to the center of the gathering, I fall to the ground before Jesus. The crowd begins to murmur something about me – or about the ruckus I have caused. I don’t hear their drone. I beg Jesus, pleading with Him to hurry along with me to Capernaum, where my son lay dying. “Please, Jesus, come heal my son – he is dying.”

It must have been some spectacle to see me, a royal official, face down in the public square begging for my son’s life before a perfect stranger. Yet in my desperation there was not one shred of self-consciousness left. All I cared about was my son – and Jesus was the only hope I had left. There is something profound and liberating about naming the unspeakable. Here, prostrate before this man, I said it out loud. My son is dying.

“Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe,” Jesus answered. I could not tell if He was speaking to me, or talking to the crowd. In the moment, I don’t really care. My son is dying. Jesus can save him. It is simple math. Nothing else matters to me. “Sir,” I spoke up, “please come down before my son dies.”

There are many things that Jesus might have answered. Yes. No. Not now. Why do you ask Me this? I do not consider any of them. My mission cannot fail. All is on the line. I believe Jesus can heal my son. If I must grovel and beg and make a fool of myself, it is no cost to pay for my son’s life.

I look up for the first time. My eyes meet His. It was just a moment, but it seems to last forever. I feel like I am the only one with Him in that instant, even though there is a vast crowd around us.

“Go,” Jesus said. “Your son will live.”

I suddenly become aware of how quiet this mass of people has become. A stillness settles over the square. I get up on my hands and knees, still looking at Jesus. Then I stand up. I wanted to say something – like “thank you” or “praise God” or anything. But no words would form. I believe it is as He says it will be. I take Him at His word. I do not stop to consider how this might happen – whether over a couple of hours or days or weeks. It does not matter. I have no doubt that my son will live. Relieved, and over-come, I bow to Jesus, turn away and step into the crowd.

Jesus resumes what He had been saying. The people now part ways allowing me to pass through. I do not see them; I don’t take notice of any of their faces. I do realize that all my anxiety is gone. My son will live. I find a place to sit down – away from everyone. I breakdown and begin bawling my eyes out. It is more than I can take.

After a little while, I don’t know how long, I begin to walk about town looking for my attendant. We find each other late in the afternoon – too late to start back home. I tell him what Jesus said. I explain that I believe Him; I take Him at His word. I tell him that I trust Jesus. He seems genuinely relieved and happy for my son, and for me. We arrange to leave for Capernaum in the morning.

For the first time in weeks I get a full night’s sleep. I was out cold. When my attendant wakes me, I feel rested and notice at once this strange sense of calm – of peace – that has come upon me. I feel light and happy. My son will live. It will be just as Jesus said.

It is another picture-perfect day as we hitch up the chariot and depart for home. The road is still craggy and requires great care as we make way, yet the jerky ride no longer annoys me. It was now mid-morning. We had traveled almost down to the sea when we recognize the two running up towards us. Both are my servants. Happy to see us, they greet us warmly and with great excitement. “Your son lives!” They cry. “He is well.” The two explain that yesterday he had suddenly and remarkably gotten better. They could not explain it, but said it was true.

We offered them water, and they plunked down on the chariot with us and filled us in. I knew it. It was just as Jesus had said it would be. “When did he get better?” I inquired. “It was right after noon – probably one o’clock,” they said. That was precisely the time Jesus told me to go, that
Friday Morning Men’s Bible Study  

St. David’s Episcopal Church  

Gospel According to St. John

It is more profitable to know Jesus than to know about Him.

my son would live. I break out in praise to God. I praise Jesus. I jump down from the chariot and begin to dance and jump for joy. My boy lives. I believe God. I believe Jesus.

I tell my aides to stay in the chariot. I am too juiced-up to ride. Let them ride; I will walk along beside them. We make our way towards home. As we make way, they too, believe!

Reflection 4: The Power of Intercession

We are not told the age of the son, whether he is a boy or older. We only see that the son was not able to make application to You on his own. Whether by the advanced stage of his illness or his imperfect faith, we cannot say. What we can observe is this man making direct appeal to You on behalf of his son. His prayer, his confession of faith, his intercession stands in place of the son’s own. You count the father’s petition as if it were the son’s. You heal him. I thank You, Lord, for those who intercede on my behalf. Help me to be more diligent in my intercession for others.

Application: Who is it in my life that is in need of my prayer right now?

Reflection 5: Meeting Us Where We Are

Given the noble rank of this father, we might have expected him to send a servant to You to implore You to come heal his son. But he does not delegate this task, but the makes the trip himself. Surely it would have been faster to dispatch a courier to seek You out on his behalf – time was of the essence. He does not consider his own station, but rather Your High Station, as a sign of his respect and faith. The greatest among us, when we come to You, must come as mere beggars. We see this man’s sincerity; his faith was a real faith. But it was not a perfect faith – he expected that You would have to come to Capernaum in person for his son to be healed. We should not wait until our faith is perfect before we come to You; and You are eager to meet us where and as we are.

Application: Jesus meets us where we are. He welcomes us as we are. Am I willing to be available to my neighbor just as they are, or do I require that they meet some threshold of my own design before welcoming them? What if I could let go of that threshold test?

Reflection 6: Gathering of Spiritual Bouquets

We read in the Old Testament how David’s servants were loath to tell him of the death of his son, Absalom. How terrible it must be to deliver that news; what a great responsibility for those who must deliver it. But here is a happy ending – these servants are eager to relay this happy news. The story may have ended there, but does not. It goes on to tell us this father questions them carefully concerning the details of his son’s healing. He discovers the time the fever left the boy was that exact moment when You said it would be so. The father rules out mere coincidence or other grounds of explanation. By this father’s example we learn how good and pleasing it is that we gather up evidence and proofs of Your grace in our lives, not only to bolster our own faith for weary times ahead, but that we might also give testimony to others as to the reason for our hope in You.

Application: How do I make record of God’s love and blessing in my life? How am I careful to gather up the evidence of God’s presence in my life?
Reflection 7: Signs and Wonders

The Samaritans accepted You and invited You to remain with them for a few days. Yet in Your home town people demanded to see proofs before they would accept You. At first it appears that You rebuff the father’s plea with a complaint: “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will never believe.” The father appears to ignore Your word; he presses with his plea, “Sir, come down before my son dies.” You appear to relent and send him away with Your word that his prayer has been answered. In another place, you tell the parable of a nagging women before a judge who eventually grants her request so she will go away. It is not a flattering portrait. But in both cases, we observe that something happens in us when we press our plea before Your majesty. Something in us is formed and sustained by not giving up – by persisting in our prayer until You send us away. Just what this is remains shrouded in mystery. Fortify my persistence in seeking You, and pressing my plea before You.

Application: Do I give up too easily in prayer?

Reflection 8: Abiding Restful Union

Once again John’s Gospel thrusts us into a painful disturbance – a father and a sick child. Before it was Nicodemus – he struggled to grasp what it means to be “born again.” The Samaritan woman held onto the rudiments of an impersonal faith, but was weighed down by the pain of five failed marriages. John’s disciple was reaching toward spiritual things – baptizing others, but his security was undone by learning that You were also baptizing. In each case we see examples of life pressures that weigh us down and pull us from the gift of abiding restful union in You. In each case we see various concerns associated with “flesh” disrupting and unsettling the good intentions of our “spirit.” In each case, the invitation is to come to You, to bring our burdens to You, to seek You out in the various storms and pressures of life which want to rob us of the gift of abiding restful union in You. In each case we see that “rest” awaiting our asking for it, earnestly seeking it out, and pressing for it as though it is the most urgent and most real thing in life. I praise You, Lord, for the offer of abiding rest in You.

Application: What are the pressures, burdens and distractions of my life that pull me away from abiding restful union in God? Have I ever known that rest? Have I ever asked for it? What have I been willing to let go of so that His peace, which passes all understanding, might rest upon me?