

Wednesday, December 13, 2017 – Advent Midweek II

“Our Way”

Luke 1: 57-66

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Adapted from CSL Series “Family Life”

Story Applied

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Maybe you’ve heard about the little six-year-old boy who announced one day, “I’m running away from home!” His parents asked him, “What will you do when you run out of food?” “That’s easy,” he said, “I’ll come home for more.” “What will you do when you run out of money?” “That’s easy,” he said, “I’ll come home for more.” “What will you do when your clothes get dirty?” “That’s easy,” he said, “I’ll come home for more.” The dad turned to the mom and said, “This kid isn’t running away from home. This kid is going away to college!”

Did you know that people—of all ages—are running away from home, and this in record numbers? The pain of sick families is so great that people will run almost anywhere to experience love and acceptance. Husbands run to bars and go on achievement binges. Women run to extramarital relationships that offer a listening ear, a loving touch, or more. Some children run from their family pain that so infects them, that later on in their twenties and thirties, an awful sickness wells up inside of them. Then their entire life is up for grabs.

We’re in a series called “Family Life.” We began last week with Zechariah and Elizabeth. Remember their devastating circumstances? Longing to have children, they couldn’t. While friends and relatives delighted in children and grandchildren, Zechariah and Elizabeth had nothing but shattered hopes and dashed dreams. There must have been times when each of them simply wanted to run away.

Homes can sometimes be tough places, can’t they? Someone once said that marriage goes through three stages. “The Happy Honeymoon.” “The Party’s Over.” “Let’s Make a Deal.” Maybe your conflict concerns money; there is just never enough. Or raising children; you’re either too strict or too lax. Or where you’re going on vacation next summer. “We always go where you want to go!” And, let’s be honest, the approaching holidays can make for some very trying family times.

Family conflict, though, is not the issue. Let me repeat that. Family conflict is not the issue. How we handle family conflict—now that’s the issue!

When conflict strikes our first option is my way. “Let me make this clear. This marriage is all about my agenda, my needs, and my wants. After all, I’m always right and you’re always wrong. That’s why my way is the best way and my way is the only way. And if you don’t like my way then guess what? You can hit the highway!”

Then there is no way. I back away. I ignore the problem and avoid it at all costs. I use discussion killers like, “Oh, grow up!” or, “Give me a break!” or, “I can’t believe you’re making such a big deal out of this!” Nothing is ever resolved because I kill every discussion. I won’t engage. I run to my room and lock the door. Solve this conflict? “No way!”

Another option is your way. I give in, I roll over and play dead. I give in to your way. People pleasing, “Whatever makes you happy, dear.” There’s an epidemic in America called the passive, detached husband and father. At an alarming rate more and more men are becoming detached, distant, and disengaged. They shrug their shoulders and say, “Fine! Have it your way!”

Zechariah and Elizabeth, though, decided on another way. And what is that? That would be our way. “On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, but his mother spoke up and said, ‘No! He is to be called John.’ They said to her, ‘There is no one among your relatives who has that name.’ Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child” (Lk 1:59–62).

Zechariah had doubted the angel Gabriel’s promise that God would give him a son, so Gabriel told him that he wouldn’t be able to speak until after his son’s birth. So for nine months Zechariah was unable to speak to anyone. This has got to be a pastor’s greatest fear!

Then, when his son was born, in the midst of all of the commotion regarding his son’s name, Zechariah “asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, ‘His name is **John**’” (Lk 1:63). Amazing! When it came to naming their son, for Zechariah and Elizabeth it wasn’t my way, no way, or your way. It was our way.

Our way means I care about solving our problem. (What are we going to name our son?) But I especially care about healing our relationship. Our way attacks the issue. It doesn’t attack the person. It emphasizes reconciliation, not resolution. There’s a big difference.

Reconciliation means my first priority is our relationship. And why is that? You are more important than our problems. Let me say that again. You are more important than *all of* our problems. Don't get me wrong. We don't bury the issue. But we bury the hatchet. We keep talking about the issue, but we talk about it together. A prominent marriage therapist named John Gottman has determined that 69% of all problems between a couple are unresolvable. Many a couple get hung up on trying to resolve everything and meeting failure. Two sinful people will never be able to reach resolution on everything. Instead, we can disagree agreeably. We can walk arm in arm without seeing eye to eye.

Why did *both* Zechariah and Elizabeth insist on naming their son "John"? Because that's what the angel said in Luke 1:13. "John" means "The Lord is gracious." The angel told them to name their son "John" because in the midst of their conflict the only way Zechariah and Elizabeth would get to **our way** would be through God's way; and God's way is the way of grace. Because of grace God gives us new life, forgiven life, and eternal life. John 1:16 says that God is full of grace. Romans 6:14 says we are "under grace." Ephesians 2:9 says we are saved by grace, and 1 Peter 5:10 calls our God, "the God of all grace." Hebrews 4:16 says that God's throne is a throne of grace, and James 4:6 says, "God gives more grace." Grace reconciles us to God. Grace reconciles us to each other.

On December 17, 1903, Orville and Wilbur Wright got their flying machine off the ground. The airplane was born! In their excitement, they sent a telegraph to their sister Katherine. It simply said, "Flew 120 feet. Will be home for Christmas." When Katherine got the news, she ran to the local newspaper in Dayton, Ohio and showed the telegraph to the editor. He glanced at it and said, "How nice, the boys will be home for Christmas." He completely missed the point! Yes, it was nice that the boys would be home for Christmas, but a person had flown an airplane for the first time. That was big news!

How often do we miss the big news at Christmas? Too often we get caught up in the tinsel and toys, the trees and all the trimmings. Those things are nice. Just like it was nice that the Wright brothers would be home for Christmas. But that's not the big news. The big news of Christmas is that God took flight. *Did he ever!* God took flight and traveled from heaven to earth. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us! And he did it to show us the full meaning of grace.

“John” means “the Lord is gracious,” but Jesus is the Lord of grace. You see, when it comes to grace, Jesus nailed it. Perfectly! But before the nails, he wanted to run away. Did he ever! Three times in the garden of Gethsemane Jesus asked his Father to remove the cup of suffering. But the Father didn’t. So Jesus went. And finally he went willingly. Jesus went to Calvary where he took upon himself all of our sin—including those sins we have committed against family members—and rising on the third day Jesus now lives as the gracious Lord of heaven and earth. Grace. Jesus nailed it. Perfectly. *For you!*

Forgiven by grace, overflowing with grace, forever in grace, when family conflict comes we are empowered to renounce my way, no way, and your way and say, “Yes” to a better way, God’s way. It’s Zechariah and Elizabeth’s way. And what would that be? You know it, don’t you? It’s...our way. Amen.