

You Don't Know What You're Going to Get

7/24/2022

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Preaching on:

Luke 11:1–13

Well, it sure is good to be back, and I really mean it. It is wonderful to be back. And I have to just thank you all from the bottom of my heart for the opportunity to have eight weeks off to help my family adjust to being a family of four with two kids now. And that is a big, big adjustment to make. It's not just a spiritual adjustment becoming a parent for the first time or the second time. It is a logistical adjustment. As many of you know. It is hard work, it is sleepless nights, it is a lot of demands on your time and your attention, but there's also a spiritual adjustment that I think needs to be made every time you welcome a new life into this world.

And for me, that is about understanding and accepting that this little life that you now hold in your hands—that you have fallen totally, madly, wildly in love with—you don't really know what you are going to get. You don't know what you are holding in your hands as you hold that little life in your hands and you bless it. And you scream from the bottom of your heart up into the heavens, "Protect this child. May this child be happy. May this child be healthy. May this child be successful. May this child be kind. May the shadow of pain never cross the door of this child."

And of course you do, because if you didn't, you'd be a lousy parent, but being a mature parent means that you also say, "And I know I don't know what I've got. I don't know what this life will be. I don't know how it will all work itself out. I don't know what's coming. I don't know." Oh, boy. And that's a hard place to be as someone who loves their child and who wants their life to be perfect because we want our kids to have a perfect life, right? We want them to be serious, but funny. Smart, but not full of themselves. We want them to be successful, but also humble. Strong, but also gentle. Spirited, but also respectful and obedient.

We want them to be perfect. We have all these visions in our head of how they're just going to be... They could be a perfect child, but we don't know what we're going to get. And sitting there in my period of adjustment, holding this new little life in my hands, just I don't know, 2, 3, 4 days after the baby was born, the events in Uvalde unfolded—the terrible tragic shooting and massacre of children. And then you really have to remember, I don't know what I am holding. I don't know what the future will bring. I am asking for safety. I am asking you, God, for health. I am asking you for a perfectly unblighted life for this child, but I don't know what's coming.

And none of us do. And then I run into this piece of scripture here that says, "Well," Jesus says, "if you ask, it will be given to you. Ask," this is what it says, "and it shall be given to you." I struggle with that because I actually think that attitude may be just the perfect way to ruin your life. I think it's probably the perfect way to ruin your kids' life as parents. Mature parenting is about realizing you don't know what you are holding in your hands. And all of your dreams and hopes for this child are your dreams and your hopes, but it's not about you. It's about her. It's about him. It's about who God created them to be.

Why should it be about what I want for this child? It's about what God wants for this child. It's about what this child wants for themselves. And so mature parenting is about not asking and getting what you want, but being there to create an environment where this child can discover who she or who he is on their own terms, without your judgment, or you trying to nudge them this way or that way, or to say, "But you are supposed to be this. You're supposed to be this way. You're supposed to be that way. You're supposed to be like me. You're not supposed to be like that." And then support them in the journey of discovering who they are and support them through all the trials and tribulations that may come in this life.

And knowing as a parent that you have to prepare them for trials and tribulations, you cannot say to them, "Well, don't worry. I'm praying to God that everything go perfectly in your life. So you have nothing to worry about. Why don't you just pray that too? And everything will just be peachy keen?" Not many parents would say that to their children because we just know that's not exactly the way the world works. And so when we run into this piece of scripture that says, "Ask and it will be given to you," what does that mean? If I don't get what I want, is there something wrong with me, or if I'm

praying for something for my child to be a certain way, or to have certain blessings and they don't get it, is it because there's something wrong with them?

So I want this morning to just push us in a new direction with this piece of scripture. And it does sound like Jesus is saying, "Ask and it will be given to you. You'll get whatever you want." That's what it sounds like. But I want to remind you that Jesus was a preacher and preachers preach the truth. They try to, but they always preach it in context. So I want to give you two different contexts for this parable and this sermon that you hear Jesus preaching.

Now, if you were to hear somebody came up to Jesus and said, "Jesus, look, I'm having some trouble in my life. I really want to win the power ball. That's my goal. It's what I want. I really think it would be what's best for everybody. Like a couple hundred million. I play every week and I haven't won yet. So I really need you to give me some spiritual advice on how to win the lottery." And Jesus said, "Well, ask and it shall be given to you. Everybody who asks, receives." "Oh, thank you, Jesus. So I just need to pray for it and I'll get it?" "Absolutely. That's the lesson you should be taking from this sermon," and off he goes, right? Contextually that would seem to be what Jesus was saying.

But I want you to imagine another context for this sermon. I want you to imagine that Jesus is preaching to a new father who is holding that new life in his hands, and sitting there on the couch and turning on the TV, and the news of Uvalde comes over the airwaves. Or that Jesus is preaching a sermon to someone who has hit rock bottom, who has given up, who has suffered and suffered and suffered, and doesn't know how to ask anymore, doesn't believe that there's any reason to ask for anything good, because all they get are snakes and scorpions, and maybe it's God who's giving me those snakes and scorpions, or maybe because I'm getting snakes and scorpions, it means that God isn't there, that nobody cares, that there is no father or mother watching over my life. The downtrodden, the poor in spirit—when you imagine Jesus preaching that sermon to those folks, to people like me and you who have suffered real hurt in our lives, who have seen real tragedy, who are terrified about a world that seems to be totally out of control and who do not know what to do next (I think we can say that about ourselves and about our culture right now. We do not know what to do next. We do not know exactly how to make things better for our children), then Jesus' sermon is saying, "Don't you dare give up. If you've hit rock bottom, continue to ask, right? If you're terrified and afraid, don't be too afraid to keep seeking, right? If you feel like you're locked out of this life, don't be afraid to keep knocking, because if you ask, it shall be given to you." You don't know what it is. You don't know what you're going to get, but beloved, don't give up. Don't give up.

Pray, seek, ask, move forward, act, do the next right thing with the courage of someone who believes that something good is going to come.