

SCRIPTURE TEXT: John 4:46-34

SERMON TITLE: Who Will Beg for the Children? (Children's Sabbath)

April 5, 1981, is a date I will never forget. Laura Jean and I were in Washington, D. C. I was a seminary student and Laura Jean was pregnant with our first child. Early on the morning of the 5th, Laura Jean began having contractions. Things progressed quickly—much more quickly than I had anticipated—so I called the hospital and they said to bring her in. We loaded into the car along with Laura Jean's mom who was there to help out. We drove to the hospital. They checked her out and told us that she was going to be a while in labor so they recommended that we go back home.

Once again we loaded into the car and on the way back home, we avoided by inches being hit by a woman who lost control of her car while making a turn on a slick street (it had been raining), but we got home okay. We hadn't been home long when things really started happening. It was clear that we needed to rush back to the hospital, so we loaded into the car once more and struck out again for the hospital. As we neared a Roy Rogers fast food restaurant, a string of buses started pulling out of the parking lot. At this very moment, Laura Jean said, "I've got to push." I said, "Don't push! Don't push!"

After waiting an eternity for the all the buses to exit the parking lot, we made it to the hospital. I dropped Laura Jean and her mom off at the entrance and then parked the car. Later that night I discovered that I had actually locked my keys in the car. I went into the hospital. They took Laura Jean on up to Labor and Delivery while a lady took me into her office to talk about how we were going to pay for the hospital services.

A few minutes into our conversation, the lady received a phone call telling her that I needed to get upstairs because the baby was ready to be born. Now we had taken a tour of the hospital a week or so before and they had shown us exactly where to go and what to do.

Nevertheless, I got on the elevator, got off on the wrong floor, frantically looked around for the place I thought I was supposed to be, finally figured out my mistake, got back on the elevator, got off on the right floor, found the dressing room, put on the scrubs, and made it to the delivery room just in time to witness the birth of our son, Brian Scott Marshall.

Within a day or so of Brian's birth, he developed problems. He wouldn't eat. He became jaundiced. His bilirubin count soared. They put him in the Intensive Care Nursery in one of those plastic boxes underneath the bilirubin lights. They put this little hospital-made cap on his head (show cap).

During one of our visits, we discovered that Brian had passed blood in his urine with what appeared to little clots in the blood. Later that night, the hospital called and told us that a doctor had examined Brian and concluded that he had a blood clot in his right kidney.

Needless to say, we were scared to death. I had been praying all along, but on that night, my prayers turned to begging God for the health and life of my son. As it turned out, he lost the function of his right kidney and later had to have it removed, but he is healthy and happy and recently married. Thanks be to God!

So I know what's like to beg God for the health and life of a son. And I identify with the royal official in this morning's gospel story who begged Jesus for the health and life of his son.

Jesus had been in Judea. He had spent time in Jerusalem and he was headed back to Galilee through Samaria. He ended up in the Galilean village of Cana where he had performed his first sign by turning water into wine at a wedding feast.

The royal official traveled to Cana from Capernaum, a journey of about 20 miles uphill. Somehow he knew that Jesus could heal his son, so when he found Jesus, he begged him to come to Capernaum from Cana and heal his boy.

Jesus seemed to put the man off. Jesus said, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” But the official persisted, “Sir [or Lord] come down before my little boy dies.” Jesus then said, “Go, your son will live.” In Greek, the word for “live” can mean either to recover from illness or to return to life from death. The man believed the word that Jesus spoke. His son lived. The father and the whole household believed. In answering the father’s desperate plea, Jesus revealed his will for life and health. He spoke the word and light shined in the darkness.

But here’s the tragic reality: There are still children sick and suffering and dying. The question is: Who will beg for them?

Consider these statistics: Each year nearly 10 million children die from preventable or treatable causes before reaching the age of 5. That’s approximately 27,000 children a day. One child is lost every 3 seconds. Two million babies die on the very day that they are born. More than half of these children could be saved through low-cost health solutions.

In America, the wealthiest nation in the history of the world, a child is born into poverty every 36 seconds. Over 12 million children live in poverty; 9 million children lack health insurance; 4,440 children are arrested each day. Approximately 3 million children are being raised in foster family homes, group homes, or institutions, or by someone other than a parent. Over 8,000 children a day are reported abused or neglected.

Now I know that all of here this morning would beg for the health and life of our own children. But the question is: Who will beg for these children before God as if they were our own? Who will beg the leaders of this world to act to alleviate the suffering of these children? Who will beg the parents of this world to take responsibility of their children and to do all in their power to care for them?

At least one thing is clear. Jesus Christ acts for children to heal and to save. Doesn't it make sense that those of us who follow Jesus are obligated to stand for health and life for all of the children of the world?

Who will beg for the children?