

God is Faithful©

Isaiah 49:15-16; Matthew 1:18-25

December 21, 2014

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Under Wraps – The Gift We Never Expected

Have you ever been forgotten, or at least felt that you had been forgotten? Our video this morning gives an illustration of what it can look like when it appears that everyone else around you has a friend, a group of like-minded peers, family who cares – yet you feel completely alone and forgotten. Let's watch:

VIDEO

You can almost physically feel the emotions of the little girl, sitting alone, waiting for someone to come. It looks like she is trying to roll herself up, disappear from sight.

Not only is she there alone, waiting for whoever seems to have forgotten her, but she can hear the laughter and the fun of the other children who are playing together, not even aware of her dilemma.

The one person who seemed to notice and made a small, feeble attempt to at least recognize she was there, was the boy who also had been waiting but then, his wait was over. He at least looked back and gave a small, half wave as he got in the car.

As I contemplated this video, I wondered if maybe she was new to the school. I can relate to how it feels to be the new kid in school – to feel uncertain about whether the other children would like me, or maybe would laugh at me. Would they ignore me?

My daughter, Annie had the same experience too – moving several times and trying to fit in with a new bunch of kids. It can be very hard, very lonely, and it takes some time to get comfortable in a new place, especially for a child.

As I watched the video, I wanted to go sit with that little girl and keep her company and assure her that probably her mom, or dad, or whoever was supposed to pick her up, were just delayed for some reason they could not help. I wanted to step into the picture and give comfort.

Surely a parent would not actually forget their child.

Well, that's not totally true either. I remember the day when my mother and stepdad (and all the rest of us as well) forgot my 3 year old brother. There were six of us kids and mom relied a lot on my brother and me – the two oldest – to help out with making sure we were all there.

We had gone to church that summer Sunday night and we all piled into the car when worship was over. It was hot and we bickered over who got to sit by the window. We did a fair amount of arguing between us – who was crossing the invisible line between my seat and my brothers. Who got to choose the radio station, who had to sit behind my dad – who had a nasty habit of spitting out the window.

So, with all that going on, I guess we just didn't notice that ... someone was missing. Until we drove the eight miles home, got out of the car and started going inside. My mother suddenly looked horrified. "Where's Chris?" She asked with panic in her voice.

We looked around at each other and back at the car, as if he were hiding in there. We shrugged and had to admit, we did not know where Chris was.

Well, it turned out the nursery attendant took him home, when no one came to pick him up and everyone had left the church. At that time, the Christian Ed building, including the nursery, was in a separate building from the sanctuary so it took a while before she realized everyone was gone.

The nursery attendant was a friend and she knew my parents would soon be calling. Chris was fine and was enjoying playing with the little dog the woman had. But my mother cried all the way back into town, feeling like the worst mom in the world. "Who could go all that way and forget about her baby boy?"

Chris was really not too damaged from that experience. He remained the baby of the family and if anything, was even more spoiled because of that incident. But as my mom always said, "He was spoiled sweet, not spoiled rotten." And to this day, I agree with that.

Well, we all know there are occasions when we accidentally, absent-mindedly forget someone, like my mom and dad did. And then, unfortunately, we know that there are also those who are really forgotten – because someone did not think they were worth their time and energy and love. Or, because they were born into a situation that was out of their control.

The sad truth is there *are* children who fend for themselves, or end up in foster care; babies who are thrown away.

And I think probably one of the most vulnerable groups of people who often feel forgotten are the elderly, those who are confined to their homes, or, who are in a nursing home.

Not all of them, of course. Many have families who visit regularly. But there is a large number of seniors who sit there all day waiting for a visit. For them, time is hard to measure.

When my grandparents were in a nursing home, it didn't matter how long I stayed, it still seemed to them that it was a very short time and the time in between visits seemed like an eternity.

Some people do just feel forgotten because of their situation, although they really are not forgotten.

Relationships – and faithfulness – that’s what we are talking about. It’s about our commitment to someone; it’s about their commitment to us. Often times we find ourselves more committed to a relationship than the other person is to us. It feels one-sided.

Sometimes we are the ones who enter into a relationship, yet being reserved, not sure that we want to trust that we can give ourselves and not be hurt. We hold back, keeping up our guard.

It’s possible to enter a relationship with God in that same way – half heartedly, holding back a part of our hearts, not fully committed, maybe a little unsure of how much we really ought to trust this God we cannot see.

Throughout the Old Testament we read of God’s being faithful to his people, even when they weren’t faithful in return. God made a covenant with them.

Covenants are not to be confused with contracts. Contracts can become null and void if broken by one party or the other. But God, who is always faithful, fulfills the covenant whether the people do or not.

Consider the covenant God made with Abraham. “I will make you father of many descendants – more than the stars in the sky.” But Abraham was old and while he was faithful in most ways, he certainly did not fully trust God in that covenant. He tried several times to help God along. He did not always keep the covenant, yet God did.

God said, “you will be my people and I will be your God.” And even when the people forgot God, God never forgot them. God kept the covenant.

And, we remember how God gave Moses the 10 Commandments – the Covenant. Even though the people kept disobeying, breaking their part, God remained faithful.

Finally, God’s promise to send to his people – yes, even his disobedient people who kept forgetting God – he promised the Messiah, the one who would be named Jesus – which means “one who saves.”

God trusted Mary and Joseph with a baby who would change the world. Jesus trusted his disciples—a mixed bunch of people—to go out into the world and preach the gospel.

Even now, God remains faithful to the church, trusting us to keep doing the ministry Jesus began – even as we are not always faithful to him.

God will be faithful to us no matter what. If we’ve wandered, God waits for us, wooing us back. If we are embarrassed, if we are grieving and carrying heavy guilt about what we’ve done, God is ready to forgive.

God is faithful even at great cost, even when it meant the death of his son on the cross. The Scriptures are clear: We can trust God.

As the apostle, Paul, writes: “Nothing can separate us from God.”

Our faithful God came to us, born into poverty, into a dangerous world, as vulnerable as a tiny babe whom the angels called Immanuel, which means “God is with us.” God has been, and always will be faithful to us, his children.

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