

“Who is Jesus—The Giver of Life”

On May 2, 2001 Mattie was born too early. At 1 ½ pounds her little underdeveloped lungs strained to catch the air she needed from underneath the plastic oxygen dome, which was just big enough for her body. Her mom blamed herself for her baby’s condition but reality said she did nothing wrong that made this happen. The pregnancy had become high risk and the doctors found themselves in a stage where they needed to buy as much time in the womb as they could.

It was already late in the evening when we got the call at the parsonage. Mattie’s grandma called asking for us to pray for Mattie. Mom and baby were at St. Vincent’s in Indianapolis (two hours from home) in intensive care and Mattie is not doing well. Mom and baby had been there.

I was just asked this week to think of a moment when I experienced the Lord, one of those unmistakable moments where you knew the Lord was working on you. This was one of those moments when I deep inside a voice said I needed to get back there right away.

It was shortly before midnight. I walked into ICU at the hospital to find a clumsy curtain fence surrounding Mattie’s family. Grandma, Grandpa, mom and dad all stood helplessly next to Mattie’s table, heat lamp keeping her warm...hoping for a miracle that sadly would not come. Mattie’s little body barely bigger than her daddy’s hand just wasn’t strong enough. We prayed and cried and hugged. The machines were not working so the excruciating decision was made to let Mattie go. Mattie died on a Tuesday -May 15, 2001 two days after Mother’s Day. Just 13 days after Mattie was born she was carried into the hands of her Savior. When it was over, mom held Mattie for a long time while dad and I went outside to talk. “Did we make the right decision, Pastor?” I can’t remember what I said, but I believe the Lord gave me the words, because anything I could have offered would not have been enough. It just wasn’t supposed to be this way.

In a packed room, Mattie’s funeral was held on May 18, 2001. It would be the last one I would perform as Pastor in Winamac before I took the call to Grace. It however, still leaves a profound impact on me to this day. Since then others have felt the same sting and I have shared that sting with them.

Luke 4:38-39 tells us, <sup>38</sup> Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon’s mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. <sup>39</sup> So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them.”

Human life at any stage is valuable. In Capernaum at Peter’s home his mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever. In that one line we know a lot. Peter’s married. His father-in-law has died, which explains why she is living with Peter. And Dr. Luke makes note that the fever was a high fever. I’ll bet that many of us have experienced high fevers—weak, five blankets but still chilling in bed, not hungry, perhaps, dehydrated, perhaps life-threatening—it’s a sign something is very wrong. Jesus rebuked the fever as he did the winds and waves, demons and disease. Once, Peter’s mother-in-law was healed she instantly got up and began to wait on them. And by the end of the day Jesus was healing dozens who heard about it. Why did they come do you suppose? Why did people bring them? ...To be healed right? But this was not the reason that Jesus came. Jesus did not come just to heal but to transform.

What we have in Luke are small illustrations of the transformation that Jesus can bring. One possessed by a demon is set free from it and made whole. One with a fever is set free from it and made whole—notice not made young, not spared the pain of being a widow, but spared for the brief moment from their ailments. The cross, however, transforms completely. The resurrection brings about a new reality that does return youth and there are no widows or mourning mother’s in heaven. This is the good news of the Kingdom of God that Jesus says, He has come to share. Dr. Luke, a healer by profession, the writer of the Gospel of Luke, writes to show us that these healings are nothing compared to what Jesus will bring about in the cross and the resurrection. Jesus will transform as well as heal.

Grace sees the individual. Jesus loves little Mattie. Jesus loves all who are small, troubled, helpless, hurting, and healthy. Jesus loves the little children; for such is the kingdom of heaven. And as a Good

Shepherd calls each child of God through Baptism by name. Tiny little Mattie was loved so deeply by her parents; imagine how much more Jesus loves her still—for He is the God of the living and not the dead. Jesus loves her mother and father and each family member. He knows the number of hairs on each head, and every thought that we conjuring in our limited brains. Look all over scripture Jesus sees the individual. And He calls us as well to love the individual too; ironically by doing so we create a community that loves one another and low and behold the greater good is realized.

Grace sees the individual. My guess is that there are many individuals that the Lord has placed in our paths. Even little ones, however brief their lives, can have the power to bring something meaningful in the pain.

I challenge you to pick one who isn't family. Pick one and help transform their world. How? Show up and see. We can't feed five thousand but we can feed one. We can't heal the body but we can give one some company or drive them to the doctors. We may not always know what to do or say, but sometimes all we need to do is listen and care. So, if you are thinking of an individual right now—if someone has just popped into your mind, or evoked your heart to wonder, give them a call and see how that individual is doing. You could wait. You may have enough things to do already, but then why is that person coming to mind? Is the Lord moving in your thought of that person because you are exactly the one who can help?

Today there are philosophies that speak of wearing out our welcome when we get older; philosophies that believe once a person cannot contribute to the greater good of all then they should no longer be allowed to live. However, we know as Christians that only one death was absolutely necessary; only Jesus' death on the cross was voluntary and for the greater good of all. The cross of Jesus went to the heart of the problem and absorbed our sin, through pain and suffering, and death. And then the resurrection follows. The resurrection promises another step that philosophies fail to realize; new life, new creation, real peace, without death or mourning or pain, in a place shared, and distinctions like tribe, people, and language pale because of the shared joy in Christ. Jesus doesn't want us out of the way He wants us to be with Him forever.

Two things to remember as the life debate goes forward: First, Human life is valuable in any form. The Person of Jesus Christ declared this to be so. By the authority of His Word we continue to declare it. And the second thing: God is as much the Lord in the hurt as He is in the help. The hurting does not erase anyone's real value. Thank God for the gift of life and those of us who choose to honor it with the love of Christ. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine on you and be gracious unto you. The Lord look on you with His favor and give you His peace in Jesus.

Pastor Matt Woods  
John 3:30