

Sermon: Breaking Open Hearts

Year B, Proper 7

[1 Samuel 17: \(1a, 4-11, 19-23\), 32-49; Psalm 9:9-20; Job 38:1-11; Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32; 2 Corinthians 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41](#)

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The church at Corinth was giving Paul a heck of a time. He had gone there and got them started as a church, and then he went on to other communities to spread the word about the love of God made real in Jesus Christ. Sometime after he had left them, there started to be a great deal of carrying on, drinking and pigging out at common meals, people fooling around together who had no business being with each other. Some other alleged Christians said that Paul, their founder, was an out-of-date pickle puss, who just wanted to make everyone miserable.

So Paul wrote a letter to Corinth. In fact, as far as we can tell, 2nd Corinthians is actually at least three different letters bolted together later on. So Paul wrote a lot of letters telling the church in Corinth to get its collective act together. Paul says *We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way* (2 Corinthians 6:3-4). Take out “ministry” and put in “parenting” and I think the list is basically the same.

You guys know I’m not a parent, but from an outsider’s observations, to which you should add as much salt as you like, it seems like Paul’s list for sharing the love of God is a lot like the list for a good parent.

There’s some stuff that doesn’t need any explanation at all. Parents face labors, sleepless nights and hungers (2 Corinthians 6:5). They need great endurance in the face of afflictions (Sponge Bob Square Pants or Barney, take your pick), hardships (Candyland, fifth game in as many days) or calamities (Senior prom) (2 Corinthians 6:4). I thought the beatings might be any number of places in the emerging music scene (no, Dad, your teeth are supposed to ache when you listen), imprisonments are either summer road trips OR basketball tournaments you have to drive to and then wait for hours (2 Corinthians 6:5). Riots are clearly a big box store on Black Friday when there are only 5 whatevers per store of that year’s got-to-have toy (2 Corinthians 6:5). Parents offer knowledge, patience, kindness, genuine love (2 Corinthians 6:6). Purity, holiness of spirit and the power of God are trickier to see, but I can make an argument that letting your kids date anyone they want so long as they aren’t Yankees fans probably qualifies. Weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left (2 Corinthians 6:7) has got to be enforcing the limitations on screen time per day. Truthful speech (2 Corinthians 6:7) that’s tricky because there’s so much truth parents offer, although sometimes there aren’t very many takers. Plus they take points off when you say “I told you so” as a parent. Paul even says *we are treated as impostors* (2 Corinthians 6:8) “Becky’s mom is letting her go” and *poor, yet making many rich* (2 Corinthians 6:10) “Dad can I have \$20?”. Parents do all that, put up with all that, take on all that, for their kids.

Paul closes by saying that his heart is open to them (2 Corinthians 6:10) and that there is no restriction on his affection (2 Corinthians 6:11). And isn’t that what parents are saying through Sponge Bob and Candyland and Senior Prom?

That's part of what we're celebrating through the sacrament of baptism. The love of parents for their children, the parents' willingness to lay aside their own needs, wants and desires for their children. Parents' willingness to open their hearts and place no restrictions on their affections.

But we are celebrating more in baptism. In the other reading from today, the storm on the Lake in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 4, the disciples and Jesus are in a boat. I realize that most of us focus on Jesus quelling the storm simply by shouting *Peace! Be Still!* (Mark 4:39). But think about those disciples for a minute. They are complete rookies at being disciples. They've only been following Jesus for a few days. But they've been fishermen their whole lives. On this lake. So bad storms are one thing they know how to handle.¹ And yet this one was so awful they thought they were going to die.

Because being a parent is like that too. There's plenty of things you're going to do as a complete rookie. But even when you're in the very center of your expertise, when you're at the heart of what you know best in the world, you can still get completely overwhelmed.

That's another part of what we celebrate through the sacrament of baptism. That parents are not alone. There are god parents and families and congregations which have promised to step in when the storms get really bad.

When Yifan approached me about singing the anthem today, he said that he thought it would work well with the storm images from Mark as well as the suffering Paul went through in his work for the church at Corinth. But on this day with a baptism, on a truly joyous day, perhaps a song which speaks of unanswered prayers and a heart breaking and trouble we wish wasn't there perhaps that wasn't the right song for this day.

I thought it was. Because every parent who promises an open heart and unrestricted affection knows another truth in their hearts. We will take on Sponge Bob and Candyland and the Senior Prom and anything else life throws at us. We will take that on willingly, no matter what it costs us in pain or treasure.

But we also know that even with all the promises we made to our children, spoken and unspoken, there is addiction and eating disorders and artists born into families of bankers and bankers born into families of artists. There are kinks in the strands of DNA that clog the machinery of our bodies. There are choices made and harsh words said. And there are patches of ice on a sunny road, or a deer coming out of the woods in the wrong place at the wrong time. Any or all of these things and a million more mean that we promise our children open hearts and unrestricted affection and that promise may not be enough.

Paul promises to not give up on the church at Corinth and asks them to not give up on him.² But why does he do that? Because God has said *see, now is the day of salvation!* (2 Corinthians 6:2). Paul does not give up on the Corinthians, because God doesn't give up on Paul and God doesn't give up on the Corinthians. Why sing a song with tough realities on this joyous day? Because now is the day of salvation.

¹ Efrain Agosto, "Proper 7, Exegetical Perspective, Mark4:35-41" in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year B, Volume 3*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008], 165.

² Brian K. Peterson, "Second Corinthians 6:1-13." *Interpretation* 51, no. 4: 1997: 412.

So that is another part of the sacrament of baptism. Whatever promises we make, to each other, to our children, to the children of our community, we make them knowing that God has made a greater, more enduring, never failing promise. When our worlds are shaking, heaven stands.³ When our hearts are breaking, we never leave God's hands.⁴ Our promises are tiny in comparison to God's, like the flame of a baptism candle in comparison with the Holy Spirit. But they are made of the same love. We can promise open hearts and unrestricted affection to our children, to family and neighbors and friends, to our fellow Christians. But our hearts open fully, our affection is truly unrestricted, when we openly, truly acknowledge that there is so much beyond our control and that is in God's hands. Our hearts may be breaking, our hearts may be opening, we may promise our children all the best we can provide. But we can only make that promise, because God made that promise first and because we are in God's hands.

³ JJ Heller, *Painted Red*, "Your Hands," Stone Table Records, 2008.

⁴ Heller.