

Adjusting to parenthood is different for every family, and each parent has that aha moment when they realize, "This is my kid." For Brian Miller, that happened in church when his son, Johnathan Emerson, was performing in a Sunday school skit and had the whole congregation laughing.

"And then everybody looked at me," Miller recalls, "and I was sitting around going, 'Yeah, that's my kid.' "

That kid came to Miller after being abused and then moving from foster home to foster home. Johnathan was 7 when Miller adopted him, and he wasn't quite sure what to make of the experience.

Johnathan suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and didn't understand that the adoption was final. He feared that Miller might give him back. Once when the school called to tell Miller that Johnathan wasn't paying attention, Johnathan ripped the phones out of the wall. He was scared that Miller might change his mind if he did something wrong.

On the flip side, when Miller tried to take privileges — like TV — away from his son, Johnathan would say, "Wait till I tell the judge this one."

Then Miller would have to remind him, "It's over Johnathan, you're adopted. There [are] no more judges in your life."

When people talk about the wonderful thing he did by adopting Johnathan, Miller tells his son, "I say, 'You don't understand. I didn't do this to save some little child.' It's father and son, but it's also, you know, you are my best friend; there's no doubt about it."

I love this story because so many of us when we think of Father's Day we think of the traditional ways that men become fathers. So many of us think in very traditional ways of the relationships between fathers and sons. But this is a story of a man who became a father and a son acquiring a father in a non-traditional way. And non-traditional are the ways many families are today and non-traditional are the ways we are called to be together in ministry today.

We continue reading in Mark today and have crossed over into the 2nd chapter. The story is set in a home in the seaside community called Capernaum. Here Jesus is speaking to the crowd and once more we are not told what Jesus is saying. Remember from last week that we learned that when Mark tells stories about Jesus he focuses on the actions of Jesus and not very much on the content of what Jesus is saying.

Jesus is in this home and some people arrive bringing a paralyzed man with them. They cannot get to Jesus because of the crowd being so large. Traditional wisdom tells them to wait their turn. Traditional wisdom tells them to just give up. Traditional wisdom tells them to stay at the back of the bus. But these four men bringing in their friend do not apply a traditional solution. They are willing to think in new and creative ways. They venture outside traditional thinking.

These four men take their friend up on the roof where they remove the roof and lower their friend down to Jesus below. A bold and courageous move for sure. But a move which ends up proving successful beyond their hopes. Not only is their friend healed by Jesus but his sins are also forgiven.

Of course, the crowd gathered is not overly impressed. Usually when folks seek creative solutions to problems the crowds do not like it. But it doesn't matter to the four friends. Their friend is healed and their friend's sins are forgiven.

Finding creative solutions to problems we face is sometimes hard to do. We get stuck into thinking that there are limited ways that one can address the problems around us. We become anxious and as a result our ability to think creatively starts to shut down. But our community needs creative solutions to the problems which we face. And I believe that you and I and this church are people very capable of finding creative solutions to one major issue facing our community today. Not 2, not 3, not 4 but 1. We start with one.

This past Monday evening at Session we talked about this. We discussed the idea that there is one major issue facing our community that we are called to address. And we discussed the creative idea that we are to engage the wider community in figuring out what this major issue is. We talked about how the decision on our direction does not come from this church or this pastor. But that the decision of what this major issue is comes from the church helping the wider community talk together and discern what God wants all of us to do together.

You see, the world we live in is changing. Just look at our families. Father's Day can be quite complicated. Some of us have biological fathers, others of us have step-fathers, some of us have fathers-in-law, some of us have men whom we consider fatherly figures who are not related to us. Some of us have great relationships with our fathers and some of us do not. There are very few traditional families left.

As a church community, we must think creatively in how to share the love of God in Christ to the larger community. We in the church must be in prayer, we must study the Scriptures, and we must worship with an open mind. We must also engage the larger community and learn to listen together to what God is doing.

As we pray, as we study, as we worship, and as we engage the larger community in discovering what one issue we are called to address together, then we will, I believe, see a building of community greater than we can imagine. I believe we will witness people see the Christ who have never noticed Christ before.

In my opening story, Brian Miller was willing to take a chance and become a father to an emotionally disturbed 7 year old boy. Through that risky undertaking he discovered his best friend.

There is an interesting ending to the story of the man being lowered into the crowd before Jesus. After witnessing this event, after hearing Jesus be challenged by some in the crowd, after seeing the paralyzed man get up and walk away, the crowd is amazed and they glorify God and then they exclaim, "We have never seen anything like this!!!"

God is in the business of creating when we do not see creation possible.

God created the world out of nothing.

God brought about the creation of Adam and Eve,

God provided for the birth of a child to an old lady named Sarah,

God led Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery,

God breathed new life through the Holy Spirit during Pentecost,

and God raised Jesus from the dead.

God is in the business of creating new life when it seems as though there is none.

One day soon I believe many of us will exclaim, “We have never seen anything like this!!!”

But before we get there, we pray, we study, we worship and we engage the community with the question, “What one major issue are we called to work on together.” AMEN.

-NPR, “To This Adoptive Dad, Everyday is Father’s Day,” June 19, 2009 and found at <http://www.facebook.com/ext/share.php?sid=92135522438&h=1gHqj&u=lrPW3&ref=nf>

-Text: Mark 2: 1-12

-Given: June 21, 2009 in Allison Creek Presbyterian Church (York, SC)