

“PLAYING IT SAFE”

(Narnia 8)

Luke 7:1-10 (p. 1000)

“And now,” said Mr. Beaver pushing away his empty beer mug and pulling his cup of tea toward him, *“if you’ll just wait till I’ve got my pipe lit up and going nicely – why, now we can get down to business.”*

“The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe” – Chapter 8

What do you suppose would have happened if the children had succeeded in rescuing Edmund? Let’s suppose they had stolen into the witch’s house and made off with him. What then? Would they have scolded him? Would they have shackled him, or at least watched him like a hawk to make sure he didn’t have another chance to betray them? What would they do next? What would you do – enroll Edmund in a Turkish Delight rehab program? From what we’ve learned thus far, no matter what they did to try to “save” Edmund, odds are that he would, first, resent their interfering; and second, he probably would have bolted the first chance he got. To stay with them would have been just too humiliating.

I say that because Edmund’s problems ran far deeper than his addiction to Turkish Delight. That was only the presenting problem. On the inside Edmund was a hurt, insecure, self-absorbed young man who had withdrawn more and more, isolating himself from the possibility of any healing touch – even from those who loved him. Mr. Beaver was right. With Edmund that far gone, there was only One who could save him. And therefore the only way the other three could help their brother was not to run after him, but to go to Aslan.

That is so counter-intuitive, and it’s one of the hardest lessons you and I have to learn. When someone you care about is in trouble, your first inclination is to immediately jump in and try to rescue him. And if you were told you that the best way to help him was to turn to someone else – especially someone you knew next to nothing about – I daresay your first reaction would probably be to reject the idea out of hand.

Nobody could fault you for wanting to intervene and trying to save someone in distress. God knows how many people need our help. And of course, you remember what the Apostle James had to say about faith without works being dead. Sometimes there seems to be no other choice but to jump in. But there are those times (and sometimes it takes keen discernment to recognize them) when your only viable course is to back off and not try to save someone yourself. This

was one of those times. But in this instance the stakes were far higher than the children realized. It wasn't simply a case of rescuing Edmund from the Witch's house. This was Edmund's soul hanging in the balance.

When Jesus said, "*I am the vine, you are the branches; apart from me you can do nothing,*" he was stating one of the most important truths that you and I will ever have to come to terms with. There are some things only Jesus can fix. And the sooner we realize it, the sooner we can get out of the way and help those in need to meet the only One who can fill that need. There are times when that is how faith goes to work.

And if you want a choice example of how this kind of faith works, consider the unnamed centurion in our lesson today. If he could have saved his servant, it's clear that he would have done so. But there was nothing he could do. Now, that's not quite accurate. In his case there was nothing he had to do. By law, slaves were no different than any other personal property. And according to the dominant values of that day, if a slave was sick or old or useless, you got rid of him. But not this time. That centurion could have played it safe and gone along with conventional wisdom. But Luke says that he cared deeply for his servant, and he went way out of his comfort zone.

Think about how remarkable it was for this soldier to have done what he did. The Jews and Romans hated each other. There was deep mutual bitterness and distrust between them. And yet this man reached across this cultural chasm, ventured out into this no-man's-land, to plead with an itinerant Jewish rabbi whom he had never met on behalf of someone he cared for but whom he, himself, was unable to help. Would you have done the same?

Well, let's put it in a modern setting. Suppose you came across a car accident with someone pinned inside and you were not physically capable of extracting him – that is, it would require something like the "jaws of life." Would you go out of your way to call 911? Of course you would. There would be no question – no hesitation. Let me ask you this? Suppose you knew of someone at risk of spending all eternity separated from God's love. And let's assume you were not personally capable of relieving the guilt and failure and bitterness – whatever it was that kept that person from being reconciled to God. Would you go out of your way to introduce that person to the only One who could save him? What's the difference between those two situations? Is one more important than the other – more worthy of your efforts?

I'll tell you what I think is the difference for many of us. You can see that person pinned in the car. But you cannot see the soul that might be lost. You can reason that if you don't go for help, the person in the car might die. But it's harder to reason that if you don't interceded, that person who doesn't know God's forgiving grace could spend an eternity grieving the loss of what might have been

and should have been. You can see the 911 keys on your cell phone and you can hear the voice of the operator taking directions and giving instructions. But you can't punch in a heavenly 911 and hear a voice telling you step-by-step what to do. So what happens? You do whatever it takes to help the obvious victim and ignore the other one; but at what cost? That's the difference, isn't it?

The question implicit in all that I have been saying is simply this: When it comes to someone whose soul may be hanging in the balance, are you willing to move out of your comfort zone and risk trying to introduce that person to the only One who can save his soul? Or will you play it safe and only deal with the stuff you think you can handle? Face it, you could look like a fool if that person called you a religious freak and told you to buzz off. Things could get a little dicey if you start talking to someone about a man named Jesus whom neither one of you has ever seen. Going around associating with Jesus could quite possibly get you in some real trouble. It might not be altogether safe. But then, as Mr. Beaver said, *"Safe? Who said anything about safe? Of course he isn't safe. But he's good."*

There's a world of hurt out there and there is much that you and I can do, and must do, to relieve that pain. But there is a kind of hurt that none of us can heal. And there is only One who is good enough to effect that healing. Dare we knowingly deprive anyone of that healing because we played it safe? Hey, none of us has all the answers. But you don't have to have all the answers. You just have to tell what you know to be true about Jesus in your own life. Talk honestly about how Jesus loves you, and he will take care of the rest. The old spiritual says it best: *"There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole. There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul. If you can't preach like Peter, if you can't pray like Paul, just tell the love of Jesus, and say he died for all."*

When I get to heaven, I want to hear the Lord say, *"You didn't always play by the rules, and you didn't play it safe – but you did good. Well done. Welcome home."*

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