

THE POWER TO BLESS

Myron C. Madden – July 1, 2012

Who in your family has the power to bless? Usually that is the person with most authority. Who is that person? How do you find out? Who does the dog follow when it thunders?

I grew up in a family where my grandfather, my father's father, had the authority, property, the money, the control, etc. In my immediate family I was the youngest of three sons. For reasons not yet clear to me, my grandfather showed special affection and attention to both my older brothers, but never to me. I will say he gave my brothers his blessing. He had the power to bless.

There is a truth that I don't want you to forget. Edward Jones, the Pulitzer-prize winning novelist says it best: "You never get over having been a child." So in a very real sense your child is a shadow that follows you all the days of your life.

In my childhood years I recall wanting my grandfather to give me the care and affection that he was giving my brothers. Not only did he not show care and affection to me but he ignored me almost completely. But the thing that rang in my ears from him was his repeated remark to my mother about me. "You know that boy will never amount to a hill of beans." With that he was done with me. But I was not done with him. That left me with a vow to grow up and prove him wrong. Along the way I ceased to seek his blessing since I had done everything I knew to get it. But this left its imprint on me for life.

I want you to think now of two kinds of blessing. The first is what my grandfather gave my brothers. It was a thing that helped them move from being children to the claim of adulthood. They grew up faster than I did.

But like so many people out there, even though they may not have got the blessing they preferred, so the next move was to get it where you find it. It can be a teacher, a coach, a scout leader, an older sibling, an uncle, aunt, a neighbor, a pastor, or just anyone out there who will give it.

In dealing with blessing then, the first blessing is that which helps a person shake off the shackles of childhood and claim a place in adult life. The person who supports a child to grow up has power to bless. But it doesn't end there. Look at it from the words of the apostle Paul:

“When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned as a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. (I Cor. 13:11)

The adult puts away childish ways, but he/she does not cease to be deeply influenced by the inner child of the past. Hear the words of Jesus in his encounter with Nicodemus. Nicodemus said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God be with him.” Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born a new, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” ...Again Jesus replies, “Truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (John 3:1-6)

So one who is born of the Spirit is often called the born again Christian. It is what the apostle Paul calls having the mind of Christ. It is having the mind focused on things above, no longer focused on the things on the earth, or things of the flesh.

Now about the second blessing – I will illustrate. A person I once knew, came to Loyola from his home more than a thousand miles away. He was a good student and graduated with honors. He was out-going, friendly and sociable. But he had a secret. He had come to Loyola to get away from his father whom he had vowed to kill when he grew up. This secret burdened him with its weight, making him fear that other people just might read his countenance. He had a professor that he held in high esteem and affection. He got to the place he decided he would share his secret with this professor he liked so much. Also he realized the secret was undermining his health. Before sharing his secret he felt sure the

professor would totally reject him. But that professor did not react as he feared, instead the professor came back with deep affection and appreciation. The student followed up by joining a church and finding himself a place in what the apostle Paul called “the mind of the Spirit.” We usually call that the Second Birth.

That story reminds me of the wisdom of Shakespeare in saying: “Give sorrow words, the grief that does not speak, whispers the o’er fraught heart and bids it break.” You could change Shakespeare’s words from “give sorrow words” to “give your secret words.” “To give words” means “accept that your secret needs to be voiced.” It needs a community. It needs to be heard.

Without our being aware, the vows of childhood tend to control us in more ways than you can imagine.

Have you ever thought how many abused children make vows of vengeance upon the abusers and bullies? In the act of fulfilling these vows in adult years, crimes are often committed and abuse is continued to the next generation.

These childhood vows cover just about every area of human existence. Many have to do with money and poverty, others with food (or hunger). Sigmund Freud thought they all had to do with sex. But more than one can imagine, the vows to murder are numerous. For example, one of my grandsons (5 yrs.), after I had lightly spanked him, came back with, “I’m going to get my bow and arrow and shoot you dead.” Of course, this threat to my life was childish, but in his mind at this point it seemed good to have me dead. If my relation to him had continued in physical punishment, this could have lead to some kind of vow to be executed in adult life.

Childhood play has a lot of killing going on. Another of my grandsons at 6 was shooting enough imaginary ammunition for World War III. I asked him, “William, did anyone in this battle get killed?” His reply, “We got seven of them and they got three of us.” And just think, these war-like imaginary battles went on with killing done every hour, every day for several years.

I had a psychiatrist friend who said his own secret for healing a person was the task of uncovering and resolving the murder impulses of early childhood. That is another way of saying you never get over having been a child. Go back to the Loyola student just mentioned and compare it with my grandchildren. The killing instinct of the children was expressed early and repressed, never to come to the surface in adult life. But the student's impulse remained close to the surface leaving him in fear that it would show up or that it might reveal itself unless he kept a vigil over it at all times. This left the student wearing a countenance of peace, a thing he never felt. In other words, he looked one way and felt another. The cost to him in energy output was double that of the normal person. It finally got so heavy, he had to share it or explode.

Sigmund Freud was the single most outstanding scientist of the 20th century, all because he discovered a way to work through the defenses of early childhood. Those defenses are so strong that the adult person is usually unable to see his or her inner child, especially when behind those defenses are hidden all kinds of behaviors that are contrary to an adult life.

So the adult person usually goes through life never having the shell cracked to reveal all kinds of unacceptable things hidden in the unconscious.

Most doctors are not trained to do what Macbeth requested of his doctor when the secret of murder began to show up in Lady Macbeth's actions like hand washing compulsion. So he said to the doctor, "Cans't thou not minister to a mind diseased, pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow, raze out the written troubles of the brain, and with some sweet oblivious antidotes, cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff that weighs upon the heart?" The doctor's reply: "Infected minds do discharge their secrets to their deaf pillows."

My supposition is that all the repressions of childhood are what the apostle Paul is addressing when he reflects that he gave up childish ways. But he goes on to add another dimension. That is the world of the spirit.

That world consists of both the Spirit of holiness and the spirit of evil. The apostle said, "When I would do good, evil lies close at hand." He calls the evil to be in control of "the prince of the power of the air." In the model prayer Jesus asks "lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." An early translation is "deliver us from the evil one."

So with us human beings the battle goes on between the mind of the flesh and the mind of the spirit. Hear the great apostle, "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, you should not commit adultery, you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not covet," and any other commandment, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does not do wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. Besides this, you know what hour it is, it is full time for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires. (Romans 13:8-14)

In the Book of Acts there was an explosion of energy in the early Christian community that shook their world. It came about because they came together "confessing their sins." In addition the apostle James said, "Confess your sins one to another and pray for one another that you might be healed." In my early experience of becoming a Christian, I was told to confess my sins to God." That really did not make sense to tell God what God already knew. After trying that a thousand times, I gave up.

In not finding peace, I was like the Loyola student. In order to deal with my guilt I selected a person to whom I might confess. Yet I was afraid I would lose this friend. Surely he would reject me. Since I could not find peace, I turned loose and gave him my greatest fault and deepest secret. There's no way to describe to you how he took my confession and came back with the assurance that no matter

what, I was still a person of worth. I don't have to tell you that this turned life around for me. For the first time, I heard the deep truth of the apostle James: "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed."

So in reality, we need to give our sins and secrets a voice – that becomes our key of entrance to the kingdom. It became my experience like that of the Loyola student. It turned my life around. If this happens to just one person here today, then my words have helped someone to claim a place in the mind of the Spirit. In that way, you will be one of the truly blessed and you will have the power to bless.

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