

## Our Way Luke 1:57-66

<sup>57</sup> Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son.<sup>58</sup> And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. <sup>59</sup> And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, <sup>60</sup> but his mother answered, “No; he shall be called John.” <sup>61</sup> And they said to her, “None of your relatives is called by this name.” <sup>62</sup> And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. <sup>63</sup> And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they all wondered. <sup>64</sup> And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. <sup>65</sup> And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, <sup>66</sup> and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the hand of the Lord was with him.

Maybe you’ve heard about the little six-year-old boy who announced one day, “I’m running away from home!” His parents asked him, “What will you do when you run out of food?” “That’s easy,” he said, “I’ll come home for more.” “What will you do when you run out of money?” “That’s easy,” he said, “I’ll come home for more.” “What will you do when your clothes get dirty?” “That’s easy,” he said, “I’ll come home for more.” The dad turned to the mom and said, “This kid isn’t running away from home. This kid is going away to college!” Did you know that people—of all ages—are running away from home -- in record numbers? The pain of sick families is so great that people will run almost anywhere to experience love and acceptance. Husbands might run to bars and go on achievement binges. Women might run to extramarital relationships that offer a listening ear, a loving touch, or more. Some children run from their family pain that so infects them, that later on in their twenties and thirties, an awful sickness wells up inside of them. Then their entire life is up for grabs.

We’re in an Advnt series on “Family Life.” We began last week with Zechariah and Elizabeth. Remember their devastating circumstances? Longing to have children, they couldn’t. While friends and relatives delighted in children and grandchildren, Zechariah and

Elizabeth had nothing but shattered hopes and dashed dreams. There must have been times when each of them simply wanted to run away.

Homes can sometimes be tough places, can’t they? Maybe your conflicts concern money; there is never enough. Or raising children; you’re either too strict or too lax. Or where you’re going on vacation next summer. “We always go where YOU want to go!” And, let’s be honest, the approaching holidays can make for some very trying family times.

Family conflict, though, is not the issue. *Family conflict is NOT the issue.* How we HANDLE family conflict—that’s the issue!

When conflict strikes, our first option is **my way**. “Let me make this clear. This marriage is all about MY agenda, MY needs, and MY wants. After all, I’m always right and you’re always wrong. That’s why MY way is the best way and my way is the only way. And if you don’t like MY way then you know what you can do!

Then there is **no way**. I back away. I ignore the problem and avoid it at all costs. I use discussion killers like, “Oh, grow up!” or, “Give me a break!” or, “I can’t believe you’re making such a big deal out of this!” Nothing is ever resolved, because I kill every discussion. I won’t engage. I run to my room or my space and close or slam the door. SOLVE this conflict? “No way!”

Another option is **your way**. I give in, I roll over and play dead. I give in to your way. There’s an epidemic in America called the passive, detached husband and father. At an alarming rate more and more men are becoming detached, distant, and disengaged. They shrug their shoulders and say, “Fine! HAVE it your way!”

Zechariah and Elizabeth decided on another way. What was that? That would be **our way**. “On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, but his mother spoke up and said, ‘No! He is to be called **John**.’ They said to her, ‘There is no one among your relatives who has that name.’ Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he

would like to name the child” (Lk 1:59–62). Zechariah had doubted the angel Gabriel’s promise that God would give him a son, so Gabriel told him that he wouldn’t be able to speak until after his son’s birth. So for nine months Zechariah was unable to speak to anyone. This, by the way, has got to be a priest or a pastor’s greatest fear – can’t TALK!

Then, when his son was born, in the midst of all of the hullabaloo regarding his son’s name, Zechariah “asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, ‘His name is **John**’” (Lk 1:63). Amazing! When it came to naming their son, for Zechariah and Elizabeth it wasn’t MY way, NO way, or YOUR way. It was OUR way.

OUR way means I CARE about solving our problem -- the problem of what we are going to name this child? But I especially care about healing our relationship. Our way addresses the issue. It doesn’t attack the person. It emphasizes reconciliation, not resolution, and there’s a big difference.

Reconciliation means that in a family, my first priority is our relationship. Why is that? YOU are more important than our problems. Again. You are more important than ALL of our problems. We don’t bury the ISSUE, but we bury the HATCHET. We keep talking about the issue, but we talk about it TOGETHER. We can disagree, but we do so agreeably. We can walk arm in arm, even without seeing eye to eye.

Why did *both* Zechariah and Elizabeth insist on naming their son “John”? Because that’s what the angel said in Luke 1:13. “John” means “The Lord is gracious.” The angel told them to name their son “John” because in the midst of their conflict the only way Zechariah and Elizabeth would get to **our way** would be through GOD’S way; and God’s way is the way of grace. Because of grace God gives us new life, forgiven life, and eternal life. John 1:16 says that God is full of grace.

Romans 6:14 says we are “under grace.” Ephesians 2:9 says we are SAVED by grace, and 1 Peter 5:10 calls our God, “the GOD of all grace.” Hebrews 4:16 says that God’s throne is a THRONE of grace, and James 4:6 says, “God GIVES more grace.” Grace reconciles us to God. And grace reconciles us to each other.

On December 17, 1903, Orville and Wilbur Wright got their flying machine off the ground. The airplane was born! In their excitement, they sent a telegraph to their sister Katherine. It simply said, “Flew 120 feet. Will be home for Christmas.” When Katherine got the news, she ran to the local newspaper in Dayton, Ohio and showed the telegraph to the editor. He glanced at it and said, “How nice, the boys will be home for Christmas.” He COMPLETELY missed the point! Yes, it was nice that the boys would be home for Christmas, but a person had flown a heavier-than-air plane for the first time. THAT was the big news!

How often do we miss the big news at Christmas? Too often we get caught up in the tinsel and toys, the trees and the trimmings. Those things are nice. Just like it was nice that the Wright brothers would be home for Christmas. But that’s not the big news. The big news of Christmas is that GOD took flight. *Did he ever!* God took flight and traveled from heaven to earth. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us! And he did it to show us the full meaning of grace.

“John” means “the Lord is gracious,” but Jesus IS the Lord of grace. When it comes to grace, Jesus nailed it. Perfectly! But before the nails, he wanted to run away. Three times in the garden of Gethsemane Jesus asked his Father to remove the cup of suffering. But the Father didn’t. So Jesus went. He went willingly. Jesus went to Calvary where he took upon himself all of our sin— including those sins we have committed against family members—and rising on the third day, Jesus now lives as the gracious Lord of heaven and earth.

Grace. Jesus nailed it. Perfectly. *For you!*

Forgiven by grace, overflowing with grace, forever in grace, when family conflict comes we are empowered to renounce MY way, NO way, and YOUR way and say YES to a better way, God’s way. It was Zechariah and Elizabeth’s way. And it’s OUR way. Amen.

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