

RELIGION

In times of pain, daddy's here

By The Rev. Bill Gestal

Here's a true story from years ago when my children were young:

It was one of those nights every parent dreads. A doctor's visit during our normal dinner time confirmed what mom suspected; our oldest had strep-throat. The doctor's visit threw our evening routine into disarray. After shoveling down a meal, I dashed out to an evening meeting.

About an hour later I received a phone call; our 4-year-old was in real pain and they were trooping back to Medi-Merge, a 24-hour urgent-care facility. Ugh, double ear infections. If our youngest had to get sick, why couldn't it have happened three hours earlier while they were at the doctor's the first time? Life is like that sometimes.

At nine o'clock my phone rang again. My son is screaming for me, I can hear him in the background. He wants daddy. Every parent wants to be loved and needed, but ...

I would be home soon.

It took a while for his medicine to kick in and my son to calm down. As I laid him in his bed my hope and prayer was that he was down for the night — thanks to the medications — but past experience told me not to hold my breath.

It was my night "on"

which means if any child gets up in the middle of the night, I'm the parent in charge. I hoped for the best and braced for the worst. Sure enough, not five minutes after I climbed into bed, sobs from the next room whimpered out, "Daddy, daddy, it hurts."

My son and me: We walked. We rocked. I lay on the floor with him. I took him down stairs. We went back up stairs. He was in pain. Anything he or I thought of we tried. Eventually he drifted off, dad and son together on a fold-out bed in the living room.

It never was a restful sleep for him or me. He squirmed and he scooched and he moaned much of the night. I knew he hurt. All I could offer him was my presence. When he twisted his little body in response to pain, I'd put my hand on him and rub his back. When he moaned my name or some unintelligible groan, I'd speak softly, "Daddy's here." I know my gestures didn't take away his pain, but I also know they helped. The touch of my hand seemed to comfort his distress. The sound of my voice quieted his moans.

It was a dreadful, pain-filled night for my son. But morning was coming and in time he'd be running again as if nothing

happened.

I learned a few lessons that sleepless night.

Stuff happens. We can rationalize and theologize all we want, but stuff happens. Life is dotted with strep-throat, ear infections and things much worse like cancer and AIDS and auto accidents and layoffs. Sometimes we are at fault, sometimes it just happens. Even though we don't like it, stuff happens.

Presence makes a difference. I have experienced it myself and I saw it that night with my son. Having someone with us during a tough time provides immeasurable help. A hug, a handshake, a chat, a smile helps. Someone there to listen to us when we moan, or cry or just need to talk, helps. Sometimes there are no words, just being present makes the difference. Personal presence really does

make a difference.

God is there. Another thing I realized is that we can call out to God when stuff happens. Jesus taught that through faith we can know God as 'Abba,' which means father or daddy. Things don't always work out the way we want. But when we hurt and twist in pain, God, our Abba, responds with a loving touch as we call to him. And when we moan or cry, God replies, "Daddy's here."

Does our pain and hurt go away when God touches and speaks? Sometimes yes, sometimes no. But even when the pain does not go away, daddy God's presence gets us through the night and reminds us that morning is coming and a new day will dawn.

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