



It's safe to say life has changed ever so slightly these last two months. Now, since the beginning of the year, Sarah and I had heard plenty of first-hand accounts from the veteran parents just how drastic the day-to-day alteration would be, and already, we have our fair share to add to the illustrious tales of the joys of parenthood. However, no matter how immensely chaotic any day turns out with the two of them, it always ends with a story: ranging from Corduroy Bear to Winnie the Pooh bear, or the Runaway Bunny to the Old Lady bunny whispering, "Hush!" in *Goodnight Moon*. I will be the first to admit sometimes those books sitting on a nightstand by the rocking chair in the nursery get rather old to read through after a while.

Nevertheless, I have come to appreciate, to absolutely cherish, *those* illustrious tales that have been softly spoken to countless children over the generations: that they beam with hope and love and acceptance. It's as if those authors are thoroughly convinced that no matter what, the child on the receiving end of those precious words is unconditionally adored. That no matter how much they cried at the top of their lungs, no matter how many diapers sifted through, that child is wonderful. Or, also, just as important to point out, the infant does not have to reach a quota of heart-warming smiles or contagious giggles in order to earn the beautiful words written on the pages beside their crib. Regardless, the story never changes inside those book covers. The hope, the love, the acceptance, applies across the human board just the same, no matter what.

Come to think of it, it's eerily similar to another set of stories that have been passed down to countless children of all ages through the generations. And yet, we hear today that Jesus wanted his portion of that holy account to be kept on the down-low for a period of time. That may not make much sense to us thousands of years later, when we know we need all the hope and love and acceptance that our hearts can latch onto and never let go. Except, as the story so goes, Peter had seen enough of the Gospel brought to life right in front of his eyes with mind-boggling healings and feeding thousands of people and new takes on the world that emphasize compassion; he's so blown away by it all to the point of boldly proclaiming that Jesus was undeniably the Messiah. Still, the Lord insists it be kept on the down-low for that time being, because well...new pages had yet to be composed in the most captivating story meant for the whole world to enjoy.

Yes, the miracles beforehand were already more than transformational enough for Peter and the disciples and thousands of others along the way, but they had not seen anything yet. Our Lord insisted that an even more illustrious account had to be written not just on a Calvary hillside or inside a distant tomb. It had to be etched into the depths of our heart, so much so that nothing we do in this life could ever remove the words of hope and love and acceptance. And even more mind-boggling to hear from this Messiah: that no matter how many times we smile to brighten another person's day or get people caught up in laughter to help them with whatever pain; no matter how well we do the whole compassion thing, we cannot earn the grace that was brought to life on a cross and out from behind a stone. The life-saving words are already etched within us before our first cry, before our first giggle, sealing us in God's eternal embrace before we even realize it. Mind-boggling grace, for sure.

Now, I have a feeling our rather young children have absolutely no idea what is being read to them in the early evening hours. But, evidently, the idea is to create a precious, even holy atmosphere, of being embraced by their parent and hearing a voice that they have come to depend on; to instill a sense of comfort and peace and safety. Soon enough, they will better understand the words from the hope-filled pages that the authors insist are for them even if they do not recognize the meaning of it all.

Unfortunately, as we grow up, we tend to have our moments in trying to keep pages of hope and love and acceptance of the Gospel away from certain children of God we deem not worthy of any kind of grace. It can start rather young: that youth will hear they are not good enough, because of grades or clothes or social life. And it can most certainly last for years to come, to the point that they wonder if those certain precious pages of God's story are meant to be kept on the down-low away from them. And yet, no matter how hard we may try, the story has been written from the heavens and brazenly unleashed to them, to all of us. That nothing, absolutely nothing that happens in this life, can ever separate us from the story with all the hope of everlasting life, all the love of a death-defying cross, and all the acceptance in God's never-ending embrace in Jesus Christ, our still-Risen Lord now and forevermore. And for that greatest story that never gets too old to read and hear, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!