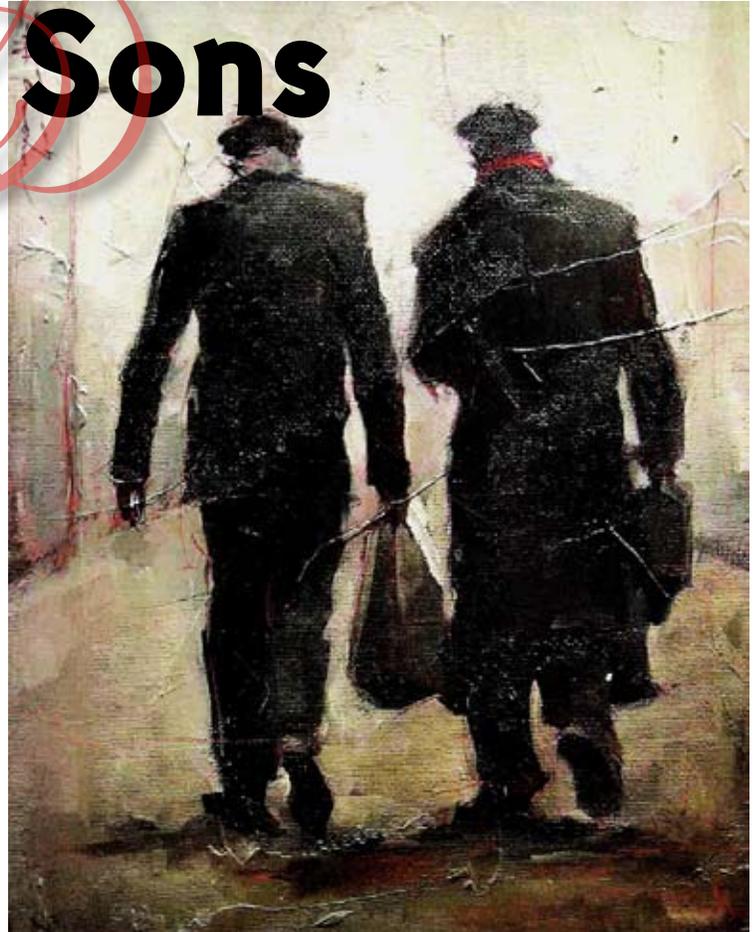


IT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE. SUCH THINGS MAY OCCUR ELSEWHERE, IN OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AND SOCIAL GROUPS. BUT NOWHERE OUTSIDE OF THE CHURCH DO THEY INCLUDE THE VISCERAL DYNAMIC OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST.

Brothers & Sons

SINCE YOU HAVE IN OBEDIENCE TO THE TRUTH PURIFIED YOUR SOULS FOR A SINCERE LOVE OF THE BRETHREN, FERVENTLY LOVE ONE ANOTHER FROM THE HEART, FOR YOU HAVE BEEN BORN AGAIN NOT OF SEED WHICH IS PERISHABLE BUT IMPERISHABLE, THAT IS, THROUGH THE LIVING AND ENDURING WORD OF GOD.

1 PETER 1:22-23



Not long ago the notice of a dear old friend's passing brought back a flood of warm recollections—not the least of which were memories of what this friend did on the occasion of my own father's funeral.

As with most, Dad's death was untimely: he was only sixty-two, but had lived his entire life with what he called a "bum ticker." In 1979 that bum ticker finally gave out, and his two grown sons came back home for the funeral.

Later in the day, after the service at the church, after the burial, even after everyone

else had left the gathering at the house, Russ and Doris remained behind. In that fading hour when the tears were spent and dried, when there was an unplanned desire to return to the less painful mundane, my brother and I busied ourselves with a few chores for Mom. Dad was no longer there to see to them himself, so his sons would.

With the simple, uncluttered manner of the Midwestern man, Russ was there with us. Even to say he was there *for* us seems too formal—too calculating. He was just there, lending a hand, offering a little how-to advice when it was requested. I was left with

the impression, however, that somewhere deep beneath the surface Russ was doing more than just killing time. He wasn't trying to *replace* what my brother and I had just lost; he was just trying to ease our transition into a life without a dad. And contained in that rather ordinary moment of three men busying themselves with the necessities of life was the full flower of Scripture's admonition to watch over each other.

In that moment was Christ.

Character

In this dusty, arid desert of today's culture,

the church is a fertile, luxuriant oasis. In a dog-eat-dog world of cynicism and self-serving machinations, the body of Christ stands as a haven of unselfish brotherhood and grace. And part of this—indeed, a vital component—is the relationship between the men and youth of the church.

To know wisdom and instruction,
To discern the sayings of understanding,
To receive instruction in wise
behavior,
Righteousness, justice and equity;
To give prudence to the naive,
To the youth knowledge and discretion,
Proverbs 1:2-4

The young man, just out of high school, found himself away from home, away from family and parental supervision. Suddenly he was in the big city with a group of others his age, there to receive training for a job. The others invited the young man to join them for a night out on the town—perhaps some drinks, a strip club to take in the sights. He was tempted, but he knew it would be wrong. In the time-honored rite of passage, when he declined the invitation they ridiculed him. But he did not go.

The following Sunday, during a time of sharing, he related the tale in an adult Bible study. Soberly the young man's elders encouraged him, affirming his decision. His seniors, speaking from experience, assured him that ultimately those who gave into the temptation would regret their decision, and that he would be the better for his.

The classic illustration is of the men of a church upholding a youth who has no other father figure on which to rely. But this was not the case. Here, with gentle, affirming spirit, the men of the church worked alongside the young man's father and mother to encourage him in the way he should go.

In that moment, with men encouraging youth, was Christ.

Mystically Charged

But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine. Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance... Likewise urge

the young men to be sensible; in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.

Titus 2:1-2,6-8

The ways of the church are only remarkable in contrast to the ways of the world in which it dwells. It is perfectly natural, of course, that those of many years would help instruct those of few. It is the way of flesh to pass down knowledge and hard-won wisdom to those yet unformed. The plumber shows his son how to solder the fitting on a copper pipe, the electrician demonstrates how to wire a light fixture. The farmer teaches the next generation animal husbandry, and how to know when it is time to harvest the year's crop.

LET OUR SONS IN THEIR
YOUTH BE AS GROWN-UP
PLANTS,
AND OUR DAUGHTERS AS
CORNER PILLARS FASHIONED
AS FOR A PALACE;

PSALM 144:12

Only in the church, however, are there the added dynamics of the indwelling Holy Spirit and the example of Christ. The first mysteriously, supernaturally binds one to the other: every man is every other man's brother; every son is every man's son. The Spirit makes us all responsible for and to each other in ways the world cannot understand. The second dynamic creates in every man a desire to be the best he can be—not just in devotion to his Savior, but as an example to the young of Christ's devotion to us all.

With Jesus Christ and the Spirit added in, simple acts of instruction and counsel between elder and youth become something

mystically charged with the unplumbed depths of God. Suddenly, perhaps unexpectedly, in that moment Christ is present.

Teaching a Life

For many years my dad taught a seventh-grade boys' Sunday School class. I can only imagine the fortitude it took for him to hang in there, week after week, sharing God's word with boys at that most perilous, chaotic age. I'm sure there were Sundays when he could only shake his head, wondering if it was worth it. Were they getting any of the lesson? Was it sinking in? Were these unruly ruffians even capable of learning the truths of God's word? I'm sure there were days when he felt as if his words were bouncing back off a brick wall.

Perhaps very little of Dad's actual words to his classes were remembered. Perhaps they quickly forgot the lessons behind the diminutive Zacchaeus stuck in the tree, the boy Samuel hearing a voice in the night, Joseph being sold into slavery to Potiphar, the Egyptian.

But what Dad found out many years later, shortly before his death, was that many of those young boys did indeed come away from those Sunday School classes having learned a lesson. They learned—and remembered—about a man who cared how they turned out, a man who was dedicated to instilling God's principles in them. Many of them, as adults, returned to tell him how much he and his patient instruction meant to them. How much his life meant to them.

And there, in that moment too, was Christ.

