

To Daniel
Spoken on the occasion of his 21st birthday celebration
among our gathered family
March 11, 2003
by
Martin Capell Rabenhorst

As I get started tonight, there are two things I need to say: 1) what I am about to say might be a bit on the long side, so you should try and make yourself comfortable; 2) as I have gotten older I have found myself becoming much more easily moved emotionally by things and circumstances - therefore, there is the strong likelihood that I will need to occasionally pause to regain my composure. Tonight I would like to tell a story about two men.

The first man had a broad smile and a firm handshake. He was physically strong and trim, and in the summer months he almost always had a good tan, simply from being outdoors doing the things he loved to do. He was very outgoing and liked meeting people and being with people. As men go, he was affectionate, and it was not unusual to be greeted by him with a big hug. He had a job in an office that he never really loved, but nevertheless, he worked hard at his work. Only occasionally did his job present him with some special opportunities which in fact really brought joy into his work. He liked doing lots of different things, and he was very skilled with his hands. He loved his workshop, and spent many evenings there. He served many people by the things he made and by the things he repaired. He could build almost anything. He loved life, and people liked him. Folks can still be heard talking about this man - usually reflecting on what a friendly and loving person he was. He liked many things, but his passion was the Lord! He wasn't ashamed to tell people "I love Jesus." He was zealous for the Lord, and loved to speak about Christ. Everyday he read and studied the Bible, and he loved to speak to others about those things he knew and read.

Then, there was a second man. He was much like the first man. He was physically strong and trim, and in the summer months he almost always had a good tan, simply from being outdoors doing the things he loved to do. He was very outgoing and liked meeting people and being with people. As men go, he was affectionate, and it was not unusual to be greeted by him with a big hug, and a kiss. He loved being outdoors. He loved playing sports -- and in some of these he would excel. He was taller than the first man, but some who hadn't met the two might have thought they were the same man. They shared a great deal -- indeed much the second man possessed, was given by the first, excepting those things that one could buy. Yet the first man would never consider that he had given very much.

One Thursday morning, the first man headed off to work unaware that this would be the day -- the day he would give the second man one of his greatest gifts, and fully unaware that he had already given this particular man many other gifts. This greatest of the gifts was to be borne to the second man by an intermediary. Indeed the first man had no right in himself to give this gift at all, at least now that such time had passed, yet it could never have been given apart from him. The truth is, the first man had no idea that this gift was being given, for it was given by the

intermediary without his knowing. Nearly three decades earlier, he had passed a portion of this gift to this one in the middle, perhaps never thinking or intending that it would go further. But on that Thursday in March, this gift of the first man was given to the second man, on that Thursday, the eleventh of March, 1982. Now on this date the second man, was not really a man – he was a man child, newly born. And the gift he received that day was a name, which belonged to the first man, but couldn't be given by him, nor did he know it was being given until after the deed was done, but it was given by an intermediary, who had himself received a portion of that gift, nearly three decades before. And that gift received that 11th day of March was, of course, the name, Daniel Capell.

During the years that followed, you grew, and you grew to know this first man who was your grandfather, Daniel Capell, who shared this gift which he had unknowingly given. And as you grew, you began to show that you had received many other wonderful gifts, those all being the sorts of things that one cannot buy. And although I will speak much of Daniel Capell tonight, those wonderful gifts you had been given, of course came from your grandparents, on both sides of the family.

One of those gifts was your physical ability, balance, strength and agility. You would walk, before your first birthday. You would climb and hang from the monkey bars before your second birthday. You would ride a two wheel bike shortly after your 5th birthday. And you would become a varsity wrestler as a HS sophomore, and a varsity golfer after playing less than one year. Yes, you worked very hard at these things, but your hard work bore fruit only because you had received a gift.

From your earliest years, you made friends easily. You loved being with people and people loved being with you. On a school day afternoon, after homework was done, or on a Saturday or holiday, there were always plans to be with David, or Matt, or Evan, or Michael, or Andrew or any number of others. And there was nothing more disastrous for you than to be found alone for an afternoon with none to play! You were always to be found in the company of others, and often would be calling the plays. Those qualities, which from your earliest years made you gregarious, and fun, and winsome, and a leader, were things that were “natural” to you - they were gifts.

How you loved “creatures.” This was true of your toys indoors, and as you grew, it became equally true of living creatures outdoors. As a boy, never were you happier than when you had a net in one hand and an aquarium in another. What a fellowship of amphibians and reptiles we shared! And your first fishing rod must have come by the time you were five or six. From bluegill in ponds, to bluefish in the Bay, to trout in a flowing stream, to Bass in lake Artemesia (moving from trout on to bass being your only mistake here), your love of fishing was legendary. What other boy would ride his bike to lake Artemesia both before and after school to fish – probably only one whose father would take him out of school for a ichthyological field trip! Even there, gifts were manifest. I have tried to teach grown men, experienced fishermen, how to cast a fly. Never have I seen someone pick up so naturally the rhythm of fly casting as did this second Daniel Capell. And having learned that rhythm, you would never be guilty of that

travesty described by the famous philosopher the Rev. MacLean that “nobody who did not know how to fish should be allowed to disgrace a fish by catching it.” Never once have you disgraced a fish! Even so, though we might embrace the sentiment expressed, we could not say with the son of the Rev. MacLean, that “in a typical week of childhood, he probably received as many hours of instruction in fly fishing as he did in all other spiritual matters.” For, amid the business of fishing, creatures, sports and play, you did receive much instruction in other spiritual matters. Indeed you worshiped before your birth. You heard the word of God, before you could comprehend it. Early in the morning, you would crawl upon my lap into the presence of God as I read His word, and spoke to him about you. And when the sign of God’s covenant was placed upon you, and all the rich and wonderful promises of God invoked on your behalf, the first man was there, rejoicing in all that was held in the moment. And you applied yourself to that learning – morning and evening every day – at least until the complications of secondary school began to erode our family meal times. And you dedicated yourself to committing to memory those 107 questions of our church’s systematic theology. Even yet today I expect you could answer the following questions: “What is man’s primary purpose?” “What is God?” “What is sin?”

Despite the fact that formal learning was never your highest priority, you always did well in school. In elementary school you were essentially always on the honor roll. You tested into a highly competitive high school, and even through middle school and into high school, if one were to read the honor roll list, that gift you had been given could still be found there often. After you graduated from high school and considered attending college, you received significant scholarship offers. Because learning in school was not your main priority, and the actual amount of time you invested in studying during high school was, shall we say, rather modest, your academic success points all the more clearly to gifts received.

The man from whom your name was given, delighted to know you and to love you, though he only saw a small portion of what you would become. One Monday evening in December when you were seven years old, that man who gave you so much, departed this earth while we were off at basketball practice. He loved you. He prayed for you. But by that December evening, he had for nearly a month been struggling to live, locked within a failing body that, while it couldn’t hinder his love, did fetter his enthusiasm and his words. On December 18, 1989, he passed from bondage into the presence of the One whom he loved supremely. A month before his stroke, he told me very plainly, that he was fully ready to go and be with the Lord if that were the path before him. So he, who in many ways was so much like you, was called home. Were we to let our hearts speak, they would have said “too soon,” yet the wisdom and depths of the mysteries of God’s sovereign rule we cannot plumb. So on that Monday evening in December, the first man departed and you were left. You were left with a name, and you were left with gifts. Some from him – some from others – all from God. Those who knew the name Daniel Capell Rabenhorst, and those who knew the man, knew that he carried the name well. To those who knew the man, his name speaks volumes in reflection: strength, courage, love, service, joy, humility, industry, creativity, devotion. These, and other things, were to him gifts of creation and gifts of regeneration. They are now the ornaments which, as we think back, adorn this name - this name which has been given to you.

Thirteen years have passed. Thirteen short moments. Thirteen eons. During those thirteen years we have scaled peaks with vistas -- the views from which flood my soul with such joy that words must fail. During those thirteen years we have passed into deep waters, so fearsome, portending such dread, that had not God sustained us, we'd have surely perished. But we have all arrived here this evening - this 11th day of March in the year 2003. Daniel Capell Rabenhorst would have loved to have been here on this occasion tonight, to join in the celebration of the 21st birthday of Daniel Capell Rabenhorst. Whether or not he owns a vantage in heaven which allows him to see this moment, I cannot say. But we are told in Heb 12:1 that "we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses" who have gone on before us. Perhaps they cheer us along the way, or perhaps they only welcome us into the celestial city. But regardless, the One whom he loved is undoubtedly among us - Him Whose presence is the happiness of every condition.

This evening marks a significant milestone. Our culture and the laws of our land decree that the day a man turns 21 is the day he is a man fully unto himself. In being thus, this means that you are this day also, a man fully before God. So before God, how will you dispose this day, and each day that follows? Not every person carries a name that has been borne by another. You, Daniel Capell Rabenhorst, carry a name which is greatly honored and admired and loved, because the distinguishing characteristic of the one who carried this name before you is that he loved God before all else. Exactly twenty one years ago today, you were given the gift of this name, and many other gifts beside. No - you are not the same man as your grandfather. But, you are much like him. You are physically strong and trim, and in the summer months you almost always have a good tan, simply from being outdoors doing the things you love to do. You are very outgoing and like meeting people and being with people. As men go, you are affectionate, and I love it that I am greeted by you with a big hug, and a kiss.

And you have been a child of the Covenant. May you live as a man of the Covenant. It is my hope that this rich legacy that you own, will be for you a source of hope, strength, direction and joy as you become the man you are destined to be. Your whole life is before you. We are with you, but God is for you.

On this, your 21st birthday, I pray God's richest blessings upon you. May you seek Him and find Him in all things. May you glorify God and enjoy Him forever. May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.