

Poopy Messes

Recently a friend called with an urgent prayer request; she'd been summoned ASAP to her son's private Christian school and they wouldn't say why. She was concerned about her eight-year-old anyway because of some traumatic life situations they had been weathering, and she feared that maybe he was acting out because of how difficult his life had been.

Turns out someone had pooped on the bathroom floor and they had traced it to "Mark." They pulled him out of his class and had him wait for his mother in the principal's office. When my friend got there and found out what had happened, she said, "My son has occasional bowel problems. He's only eight years old. Why are you making a big deal about this?"

"Because," they replied, "he didn't tell anyone about it! He should have told someone! You don't leave poop on the bathroom floor! That's wrong!" They made it sound like he'd been caught stealing or setting the school on fire.

"Mark," my friend asked her son kindly, "Is there a reason you didn't tell anyone?"

In a small voice Mark answered, "I didn't know what to do."

My friend reassured her son there at the school and again when they got home, even though she was boiling inside at the insensitivity of the school personnel who made a scared little boy feel like a criminal for simply not knowing what to do.

What was missing was the awareness of a safe person he could tell "I messed up" without The Fear Of God hammering down on him. What was missing was any interaction with any adult with a kind face and a disposition of grace that understands that sometimes little kids make poopy messes that paralyze them with fear, and it's okay. That we clean it up, give a hug, and you're on your way. What was missing was a grown-up who remembers that there's a difference between making a mistake and making a choice to be rebellious.

My heart hurts for little Mark and for Mark's mommy, both of whom desperately need to experience the grace of safe people for both literal and figurative "poopy messes."

So I've been thinking about what it means to be a safe person, a grace person.

It means first of all being in touch with our own messes and our own sinfulness and our own desperate need for a gracious Savior. It means delighting in receiving the grace and mercy of God, and being committed to passing that grace and mercy on to others. It means remembering that since we live in a fallen world, everyone walks around with an invisible tattoo on their forehead that says, "Please encourage me." It means trusting God to shine His love and His grace and His mercy through our faces like so much light streaming through a stained glass window. It means remembering that everyone is still very much in process and a long way from our final form of glorified beauty and strength when Jesus is finished working on us.

It means that when someone makes a poopy mess, we set our minds on responding with "I'm sorry" rather than "shame on you."

Because it won't be long before we're needing some grace for our own poopy mess. Again.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/poopy_messes