

The Man from Heaven has connections!

John 5:16-30

I wonder whether you are friends with anyone famous? Can you count as a personal friend someone who the rest of us would recognize? I don't think I can say that I do.

Let's lower the bar a little. Can you count as a personal friend the son or daughter of someone famous? This is where I think I can put up my hand. You may have heard of the name Harry Seidler, he passed away a couple of years ago now, but he was one of Australia's best known architects. Australia Square...Blues Point Tower... Ian Thorpe Aquatic Centre...Rose Seidler house just down the road in Turramurra. His daughter Polly is a friend of mine.

And as the daughter of someone successful and famous there are certain privileges that Polly enjoys. One time Polly invited a bunch of us over to her unit, which just so happens to be in an tower designed by her father. We walked out of the lift and into her lounge room where one wall was made of glass, and there on the other side of the glass was the harbor bridge, the other towers of the Sydney skyline. It looked like you could just reach out and grab hold of them.

I said to Polly, "this would be a great place to watch the New Year's fireworks!" Polly, to her credit, understood the hint that I was dropping, and so we all got invited back again on Dec 31st. There are distinct advantages to being the daughter of someone important.

Today is Easter Sunday, the day when we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. And it was on that very first Easter Day when Jesus' very own family connection was demonstrated and declared to the rest of the world. Here's how Paul puts it in Romans 1:4 Jesus was declared to be the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead. When Jesus emerged from the tomb, it was a moment which announced to the world that this is God's Son. It's probably one of the least explored aspects of Easter Day actually, the idea that the resurrection is an announcement of Christ's identity: Christ lives again, therefore he is God's Son.

And of course, this special family relationship that Christ shares with the Father means that he has special privileges and special powers. One place where we see these privileges and powers is in John Chapter 5, and there we discover Jesus' desire to exercise these powers on our behalf. Being God's Son is not something Christ keeps to himself, but it's a relationship that he's willing to work to our advantage. That Jesus emerged from the tomb is not only good news for Jesus but it's good news for us as well. How so? Let's have a look.

We are in John Chapter 5 beginning at v16, and in this section of John we see three aspects of what it means for Jesus to be God's Son. The first is there in verses 16-18 So, because Jesus was doing these things [miracles] on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. ¹⁷ In his defense Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day,

and I too am working.”¹⁸ For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

What does it mean for Jesus to be God’s Son? Well, first of all it means that he shares in his Father’s nature. As the Father is God, so too is the Son. If you’ve ever been caught up in an argument with someone about the Christian faith, Then you may have heard someone declare with utmost confidence that “Jesus never said that he was God.” What some opponents of Christianity are looking for is an explicit statement in our English translation where Jesus says, in quotation marks, “I am God”. Of course, we never get those exact words from Jesus, and so some people think this is irrefutable evidence that Jesus never thought of himself as divine!

But what do we have here in these verses? Jesus uses a turn of phrase that was crystal clear to his contemporaries. You can’t blame Jesus for not using the words we would like him to use, he uses the words that were important to his context, and in Jesus’ day, calling yourself God’s Son was one way that you would claim a divine nature for yourself. The people listening to Jesus understood this, hence their very angry reaction, and John understands this as well, hence his editorial comment there at the end of verse 18. So Jesus being God’s Son means that he shares in the Father’s nature.

What else does it mean for Jesus to be God’s Son? It means that he has insight into the Father’s world: he sees things that only the father sees, he knows things that only the Father knows. Take a look at verse 19: Jesus gave them this answer: “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.”²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.

I spoke just a few moments ago about Harry Seidler, an architect well associated with our city. Of course another architect people associate with Sydney is Jørn Utzon, The Danish architect who designed the ... Sydney Opera House. Now there was a project that didn’t go smoothly. Utzon’s design was ambitious and so it took a lot longer than anticipated. The project well-exceeded budget and so there was tension with the politicians. The government disagreed with Utzon as to which hall should be for opera and which hall should be for concerts. All these problems caused Utzon to walk off the job, and so while he was able to get the outside constructed the vision for the interior was never realized.

Now Utzon died in 2008, and since then the state government has made some attempts to recapture some of the lost vision for the building’s interior. And who have they asked for help? The architect’s Son. *Jan Utzon* is also an architect who worked with his father on various projects, over many years he was able to watch his Father work and learn his ways, and so who better to employ to revisit the design of the Opera House? And so it is with Jesus Christ. As God’s Son he sees the world as the Father sees it, and so who better to listen to when thinking about the nature of our world?

I remember speaking to an atheist once who challenged me on my belief in heaven and hell. He said “how can you believe in places that you’ve never seen?” I said “You’re right, I’ve never seen them, but I’m relying on the testimony of one who has seen things in that realm. Jesus is the one who has seen what the Fathers sees.” And then he said “Well, how can you trust what Jesus said?” and at that point the discussion went into the historical nature of the Bible. But at least he heard that we Christians aren’t relying on random ideas. Our belief is based on the testimony of Christ, a testimony that as God’s son he’s seen things that are not available to us. We should listen to him.

A third implication that stems for Jesus’ identity as God’s Son, and this is where the advantages for us become most pointed, is that as God’s Son, Jesus shares the Father’s business. Did anyone here follow one of their parents into a field of work? It’s not as common these days, but Jan Utzon followed his father into architecture, and this is my own story actually; my father is an Anglican minister. It wasn’t until I was in my mid twenties that I decided to follow suit, but, nevertheless, here I am doing the same job that my father did.

Back in Jesus day it was a lot more common for a young man to follow his father. It’s our access to education as youngsters that allows us to get to the point where we can make our own choice, but without that system the only real vocational education you’re going to get is what’s available to you in the home and so boys would follow their fathers. Jesus is using language that would have been very familiar with his audience, the Father showing the Son all that he does.

And what is the Father’s business? Well, he is the creator. He is the one who creates life out of nothing. And so what does the Son do? Verse 21 For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.

And just as the Father gives life with a word (think back to Genesis 1 where God speaks and things come into being), so too Jesus is able to give life with a word, verse 25 Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. And again in verse 28—these are incredible words—Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out. Just wrap your minds around what Jesus is saying here—and this will be the case for each one of us—after we have died, at some point or bodies will be awakened by the voice of Jesus.

A little later on in John’s gospel Jesus gives us a demonstration of what he means. In Chapter 11 his friend Lazarus has died, and Jesus is brought to the tomb where, after weeping over his friend’s death, he calls out in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” John then reports that the dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.” And the promise of chapter 5 is that this is an experience that all of us will have one day. “I can come

out, ..." And so it's in this way that Christ's sonship is of great benefit to us: Like his father, he's in the business of granting life in the place of death.

I remember one interesting occasion when Jas and I were in a meeting with our former accountant. And he kept on being interrupted by another client on the phone. This other client was obviously very anxious about some financial matter, his business was going belly up or something, and our accountant was trying to reassure him. He kept saying to this client: "Don't worry about it mate. There's no need to worry, I know a guy, I know a guy who can fix all this up, the problem will disappear, he knows what to do." I have no idea what kind of solution was being offered in that scenario, whether it was legit or a bit crook, but the solution was all wrapped up in knowing the right guy.

Death is a problem for all of us, a problem that causes a lot of anxiety. But there's no need to worry. Why? Because we know a guy. His family has been in the life giving business for a long time, he knows what he's doing because he learnt it from his father.

You know, elsewhere in the Bible we Christ followers are encouraged to not grieve like the rest of humanity who have no hope. When the inevitable comes and we have to deal with death, the Bible suggests that our grief as can look a little bit different because we can face death with the hope of living again. I know a nurse whose observation is that Christian people die differently. They have a certain peace as they face the end of their life. Why? They know the Son who, like the Father is in the business of giving life.

And when the Son calls us out from the grave, that's when we will see him carry out another aspect of his father's business, from verse 28 again: a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. ³⁰ By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me. And a little earlier as well in verse 22 Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son.

Christ is in the business of giving new life, but he's also in the business of judging what we do with our initial life.

This news can be a little disconcerting: the idea that God will judge our lives. But I think in theory we agree with the concept of God being a judge, because we all love justice and we all have a longing for justice to be done, and for justice to be done there needs to be a judge.

I mentioned my father earlier on; how he was an Anglican minister before me. For ten years he was the Anglican minister in Mt Druitt in Sydney's far west, a place that had a lot of poverty and social issues back then as it does today. I like to keep an eye on the news coming out of my old neighbourhood, particularly through [an

internet] a facebook group I'm a member of. It's called "I climbed Mt Druitt and survived!" A name that accurately describes the mindset of lots of locals. A few weeks ago the news from the Druitt was that the police were having a massive crack down; they made a bunch of arrests over a weekend operation which was aimed at "reducing gang violence and public shootings". The police indicated that the operation received strong community support, which makes sense; it's what want our police to be doing, isn't it? Going after the bad guys, making our neighborhoods safer. We want justice to be done.

The problem is when the eyes of the law start turning on us, that's when we get a little uncomfortable with the idea of justice. Being Easter it's double demerits on the roads, I always get a bit nervous. "Did I just inadvertently speed through a camera? What if this is the weekend I make a mistake?" Knowing the law is watching can make for a nervous weekend, Knowing that in Jesus we have a judge—that could make for a nervous life.

For some, the idea of Jesus calling them to account is too much to bear and so they deal with it by pretending that his judgment isn't real. I think the better strategy is not to run away but to come towards the judge, and to listen to what he has to say about how his courtroom will work. Verse 24 is a wonderful summary of so much of what we've seen already: Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. "Whoever hears and believes has eternal life and will not be judged." Do you believe that Jesus was raised from the dead? Do you believe that he is the Son of God, with all that that title entails? If your answer is *Yes*, then you will not be judged for your sins, and eternal life will be yours!

You know when the fireworks were over, Polly got to stay in her apartment while the rest of us caught the train home. The reality is that children of famous people can only do so much for us. But Christ's relationship with the Father *really is* something that benefits us. All he asks is for us to believe that his relationship with the Father is real, and to entrust ourselves to him as he completes his father's business.

Can I lead us in prayer?