The Anguishing Choice

The following story was shared with me this week. Its author is unknown. It is not clear whether this is a factual story or a parable. It is believed to be from a book, *Stories for a Faithful Heart*, and attributed to Carla Muir. Nonetheless, the truth it represents is compelling.

After a few of the usual Sunday evening hymns, the church's pastor slowly stood up, walked over to the pulpit and, before he gave his sermon for the evening, he briefly introduced a guest minister who was in the service that evening.

In the introduction, the pastor told the congregation that the guest minister was one of his dearest childhood friends, and that he wanted him to have a few moments to greet the church and to share whatever he felt would be appropriate for the service. With that, an elderly man stepped up to the pulpit and began to speak.

"A father, his son and a friend of his son were sailing off the Pacific Coast," he began, "when a fast approaching storm blocked any attempt to get back to the shore. The waves were so high that even though the father was an experienced sailor, he could not keep the boat upright, and the three were swept into the ocean as the boat capsized."

The old man hesitated for a moment, making eye contact with two teenagers who – for the first time since the sermon began – were looking somewhat interested in what he was saying.

The aged minister continued with his story. "Grabbing a rescue line, the father had to make the most excruciating decision of his life: to which boy would he throw the other end of the lifeline? He only had seconds to make the decision. The father knew that his son was a Christian, and he also was aware that his son's friend was not. The agony of his decision could not be matched by the torrent of the waves.

"As the father yelled out, 'I love you, Son!' he threw out the lifeline to his son's friend. By the time the father had pulled the friend back to the capsized boat, his son had disappeared beneath the raging swells into the black of night. His body was never recovered."

By this time, the two teenagers were sitting up straight in the pew, anxiously waiting for the next words to come out of the old minister's mouth.

"The father," he continued, "knew his son would step into eternity with Jesus, and he could not bear the thought of his son's friend stepping into an eternity without

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Jesus; therefore, he sacrificed his son to save the son's friend.

"How great is the love of God that He should do the same for us," the minister exclaimed. "Our Heavenly Father sacrificed His only begotten Son that we could be saved. I urge you to accept His offer to rescue you and take a hold of the lifeline He is throwing out to you in this service."

With that, the old man turned and sat back down in his chair as silence filled the room.

The pastor again walked slowly to the pulpit and delivered a brief sermon with an invitation at the end. No one, however, responded to the appeal.

Within minutes after the service ended, the two teenagers were at the old man's side. "That was a nice story," politely stated one of them, "but I don't think it was very realistic for a father to give his only son's life in hopes that the other boy would become a Christian."

"Well, you've got a point there," the old man replied, glancing down at his worn Bible. Then a big smile broadened his narrow face.

He looked up at the boys and said, "It sure isn't very realistic, is it? But I'm standing here today to tell you that the story gives me a glimpse of what it must have been like for God to give up His Son for me. You see, I was that father and your pastor is my son's friend."

        --Beecher Hunter