

## True Mother's Love

Texts: Acts 7:55-60

1 Peter 2:2-10 (Series A. 5th Sunday of Easter) Ps. 31:1-5, 15-16

John 14:1-14

Free Text: 2 Timothy 1:5 (Mother's Day)

"I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also."

Prayer:

On this Easter Five, I would like to change channel from an Easter theme to Mother's Day, with a few thoughts on mothers. In 2nd Timothy chapter 1, verse 5, we're going to focus on this 'one verse' for our devotion.

Abraham Lincoln once said, "I regard no man as poor who has a godly mother." He went on to say, "I remember my mother's prayers, and they have always followed me; they have clung to me all my life. All that I am or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother"...A mother's influence.

I love the following story, and I would like to share it with you, this morning: There is an ancient legend about two warring tribes in the Andes, one that lived in the lowlands and the other high in the mountains ...The mountain people invaded the lowlanders one day and, as part of their plundering of the people, they kidnapped the baby of one of the lowlander families and took the infant with them up into the mountains.

The lowlanders didn't know how to climb the mountains. They didn't know any of the trails the mountain people used. Consequently, they were unable to track the mountain people in steep terrain. Nevertheless, they sent out their best party of fighting men to try to climb the mountain and rescue the baby. The party of lowlanders tried one trail and then another. They tried one method of climbing, and then another.

After several days of futile efforts and feeling helpless and hopeless, the men decided that the cause was lost, and they prepared to return to their villages below. As they were packing their stuff for the descent, they saw the baby's mother walking toward them. They realized that she was coming down the mountain that they themselves were unable to climb. Then, they saw that she had her baby strapped to her back. How could that be?

One man greeted her and said, "We couldn't climb this mountain. How did you do this when we, the strongest and most able men in the village, could not?" She shrugged her shoulders and said, "It wasn't your baby!" This is Mother's True Love, the most powerful instinct in women.

A mother's love is so unconditional and exceptional that it is in a category by itself. Some give it its own name; they call it "Mother-love." It is a degree of love that is only fully expressed by the love of a mother. It is the kind of love that persists no matter what wrong is done to it. Even among wild animals, a mother will give her life to save her offspring. So people respond to that degree of love with an equally fierce loyalty.

The story of the modern celebration of Mother's day goes back to Ann Marie Jarvis. She not only gave birth to twelve children, eight of whom died in childhood, but she founded a group called "Mother's Day Work Clubs" that offered humanitarian aid to soldiers on both sides of the Civil War.

After the war, she organized a "Mother's Friendship Day" to bring people from both sides of the war together and to heal the wounds of the war. In other words, she took the ideal of a mother's love and applied it to loving her neighbour - even when that neighbour was an enemy.

Ann Marie Jarvis died in 1905. Following her death, one of her daughters, Anna Jarvis, organized the first celebration of Mother's Day. Andrews Methodist Episcopal Church held the first public service for which Anna donated carnations to be given to each participant in honour or in memory of their mothers. The idea caught on and, by 1914, "Mother's Day" was a national holiday. Mother's day is so popular that it is celebrated in most parts of the world.

One day, the worship committee of First United Methodist Church of Somewhere, South Carolina was meeting. They were discussing what to do to recognize Mother's Day. They decided to give a rose to the oldest mother in the congregation, and one to the mother with the most children, grandchildren etc. present in church. They also decided to have all mothers stand.

Then someone on the committee got worried. What should they do about Miss Smith? She never had any children. But she had been teaching the first grade Sunday School class for 30 years. She was like a mother to all of them. Shouldn't they be able to recognize her on Mother's Day?

The Worship Committee of First United Methodist Church in Somewhere had run right into one of the truths of the Christian faith. In the church, all women are mothers. It doesn't matter whether they have any children or not.

Miss Smith of First United Methodist Church never bore a child, yet she mothered every child who came into her class. In the world's eyes, she wasn't a mother to even one child but in God's eyes she was a mother to hundreds.

To understand this truth, we have to understand the church. The church is a family, the family of God. Through baptism we have been adopted as children of God. God is our father, and Christ is our brother. And, everyone else in the world who has been baptized is our kin.

When Jesus was told that his mother and brothers were looking for him, what did he say? He said, "Who are my brothers and my mother? Those who do the will of my father are my brothers and sisters and mother." When we are baptized we are joined by the power of the spirit to a new family.

In God's eyes, we cease to be John Doe and Jane Doe. We become John Christian and Jane Christian, children of our Heavenly Father; in this family, the older and experienced members have the responsibility of raising and caring for the younger and inexperienced members.

In that sense, we are all parents to those who are growing in the faith around us. (Vitalis, who discipled me when I became a Christian in 1969; Maria Heuberger, in Kitzingen, Germany; Maria Forum Jensen, Olgod in Denmark all nurtured me in the faith). I give credit to many godly people who have helped shaped my faith and believe in the living God in my Christian journey. I believe that, in Christ, we are all foster fathers and mothers for God's children. So today, we honour all women in the church and outside because, in God's eyes, you are mothers all.

"Oh that sounds sweet: All the women are mothers." Not so fast! It's not sweet; being a mother is hard. You don't know what you have gotten yourselves into. I don't know about being a mother but I have had

many, many years of on-the-job training on being a father. It's difficult; it's hard work. It's not all cuteness and smiles. It's an awesome responsibility.

More and more, I worry about the dangerous effect of the world. The world wants to lure God's children into ways of life that offer no real fulfillment: into materialism, into drugs, into hatred, into spiritual alienation from God. It's easy to immunize them against the diseases of the body but what about the diseases of the soul?

This is the task all women, as mothers in God's eyes, have signed up for. When a child is baptized, the church makes a promise before God to: live according to the example of Christ, surround that child with love and forgiveness, help them grow and become disciples of Christ. That means taking the responsibility to protect them from the world and to prepare them for the world. Any parent knows that you can't live your child's life for them. There comes a time when the apron strings need to be cut. And when that happens, you can't protect a child from the world; you can only pray for them. In the meantime, we need to prepare our children in the faith to face the world. We need to help them learn how to use the whole armour of Christ, to train them in spiritual warfare so that they will not only be safe but may attack the gates of hell with the power that comes only from God. In the light of this awesome responsibility that Christian mothers have, I feel that a passage from Ephesians is appropriate for today. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers" (Eph.1:15-23).

In this passage, Paul gave thanks for the faith and love of the Ephesians. Obviously, they were a people who had great faith in Jesus, and they were a people who lived out that faith in love for one another. They were a church of Christian mothers and fathers who cared well for God's children.

But Paul knew that the Ephesians faced trouble, so he began to pray for them. He prayed that they would receive a spirit of wisdom and revelation. He also prayed that the eyes of their hearts would be enlightened so that they would know of the hope they had in Christ.

It is important to note what it is he wanted them to see. He wanted them to see what is their hope and their power. Paul knew that the forces opposed to the Ephesians were greater than they were. The people of the church of Ephesus would be easily crushed by their foes.

But Paul also knew that Jesus had ascended into heaven. And that all things, all powers, were subject under him, even the powers which opposed Ephesus. This was their hope: the power of the glorified Christ, the power of God Almighty. Like Paul, I give thanks for the faith and love of the mothers of this church.

I remember the love and nurture of many of them. There was my own mother of course. Her example of faith, trust, and devotion to Jesus Christ had a great effect on me. She is one of the reasons I am a Christian and disciple of Christ today. But there were many others to whom I alluded to earlier.

The image of God as Shepherd is a good example of this. God cares for us as a good shepherd. God provides for our every need. God takes us to green pastures and leads us beside still waters. And, God protects us from wild animals that would devour us. Like a mother, God prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies. When others would flee, God remains steadfast, providing for our every need...Just like a mother who stands by her child though difficult times.

Of course, God's love is greater than any love a human can produce. "Mother-love" is only an analogy that helps us understand God's love. But it's a good analogy. It helps us understand how loving and giving God's love is. The most unconditional example of human love is a Mother's love.

To say that God loves us more than that at least gives us a frame of reference. Jesus is the prime example of God's "Mother-love." In Jesus, God died for his children. The ultimate expression of love is to give one's life for another. (John 15:13)

We need the insight to know what is true and good. We need the patience to persevere. We need the grace to be forgiving, when little hands and feet do what they shouldn't. We need the faith to know that a point comes when we can't do anything and that it is all in the Lord's hands.

I also pray we might have the insight into the power, which is our hope. There is a power that can overcome all that threatens our children. The source of this power is the glorified Jesus Christ. Don't try to be a Christian mother without it. It is impossible. You can only succeed at being a Christian mother if your source of power is the one who ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God Almighty, Jesus Christ. Amen.

HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY