

A Godly Home

a sermon based on

John 14:1-14
with 1 Peter 2:2-10

and delivered on-
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5th Sunday of Easter (Year A)

for
Cherry Valley United Methodist Church

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"In my Father's house there are many dwelling places,.. and I go to prepare a place for you."
(Jn 14:2) Not an exact quote, but close enough. Don't you think? It gets to the gist of what Jesus is saying. Did you notice a little bit of the irony? Jesus describes his Father's house, but today is Mother's Day.

Not only that, but this secular holiday is second only to Easter in church attendance. Yet here we are: watching on a computer screen or tablet, maybe casted to a television set, or just listening on a telephone. That sounds disappointing, especially for Mother's Day, but here we are!

Think about that for a moment: Here we are. We have gathered – we have been gathered as a hen gathers her brood under her wings. Not as closely as we would like, we have gathered. Why?

So many of us who can't point to the moment when we became a Christian are privileged to have been raised in faith. In the early days of the Church, most Christians were converts: they grew up in pagan homes, then upon hearing the gospel and seeing what happened among Christians they accepted Jesus and that glorious offer of salvation – of deep transforming healing and restoration – that he extended on the cross with his arms spread as if to say, "I love you this much."

There watching, was Mary, his mother. I wonder if she frightened the soldiers? Or maybe worried them? Mothers can be fierce; that's why when I've been asked if I'm ever afraid of seeing a bear when backpacking my answer is "No;" I'm afraid of seeing a cub, because Mama bear doesn't care who started the encounter. Moms are like that.

It's fitting, therefore to hear this affirmation from John Killinger in his book, *Lost in Wonder, Love, and Praise*:

I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God,
who was born of the promise to a virgin named Mary,

I believe in the love Mary gave her Son,
that caused her to follow him in his ministry
and stand by his cross as he died.

I believe in the love of all mothers,
and its importance in the lives of the children they bear.

It is stronger than steel, softer than down,
and more resilient than a green sapling on the hillside.

It closes wounds, melts, disappointments,
and enables the weakest child to stand tall
and straight in the fields of adversity.

I believe that this love, even at its best,
is only a shadow of the love of God,
a dark reflection of all that we can expect of him,
both in this life and the next.
and I believe that one of the most beautiful sights
in the world is a mother who lets this greater love flow through her to her child,
blessing the world with the tenderness of her touch
and the tears of her joy.¹

Mothers play an important role in Scripture and in life. They bear life. How cool is that? How awesome. Although there are exceptions – they persevere in nurture and encouragement, even in their own anguish. We see that in the story of Hagar and Ishmael, the widow who dared

¹ John Killinger, *Lost in Wonder, Love, and Praise* quoted in Craig Brian Larson, *Illustrations for Preaching & Teaching from Leadership Journal* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Baker Books, 1993) 160.

to trust Elijah's promise from God that if she shared the last meal she possessed for she and her son that it would continue. It did, until her son died. Even then, she didn't give up. Through her persistence, God used Elijah to restore the boy to life. (1 Kgs 17:8-24)

Mothers are the ones who nurture and defend us. Some are better at it than others. Some have more challenges than others, whether by circumstance or the impishness of their offspring. They make mistakes; but at their best they bear that godly light that we are loved even at our worst. That's God's love exemplified by Jesus on the cross. Isn't it? That God loves us even at our worst, with "a face that only a mother could love"?

In a Jewish household, it was the mother's responsibility to teach the faith. Jesus would have learned carpentry from Joseph, but Mary would have been the one teaching him the Scriptures so that he could grow into man he was. That's really a parent's job. Isn't it? To raise an decent adult?

It's no accident that Peter in the passage today, speaks about how "Like newborn infants yearning for pure, spiritual milk, that we grow into salvation." (1 Pet 2:2) He goes onto speak about being a chosen people and royal priesthood receiving God's mercy. How does that come about? By obedience and by following his example, by mothers and fathers teaching us how to live as Christians.

Many of us had the privilege of growing up in a household of faith. We might take that for granted. I know some of you who didn't have that privilege and yet God still drew you in to his love. So how do we live it? Although it was in the context of leading worship I think it applies in so many areas, a seminary professor once told my class that "everything we do teaches."

As Christians, everything we do teaches others about God. Do our lives reflect God's love and mercy? Do our lives reflect the best of who we were made to be? Let's face it: not always. That's why it's good that like a mother willing to stand up for her child at his worst, Jesus never pulled his hands off that cross.

During this time of sheltering in place, many of us have had to change how we live in a household. We don't get a break from one another. Those with children now have to become school teachers while trying to learn for themselves how to do common core math. There will be relief when kids can go back to school; and I hope, a greater appreciation for teachers. But there are other opportunities about this new dynamic.

When a family comes asking to have their baby or child baptized in the church, I have an obligation to talk to them first. The promises parents make include a promise to raise the child in the faith and to set a godly example. To that end, I often talk about how this new dynamic, this new addition (usually it's an infant) to the family gives an opportunity to start new practices that maybe neither parent had growing up.

My mother will probably be horrified if she's watching right now. However, I remember as a child (I couldn't have been ten), that the pastor had come to the house for a meal. My brother and I were sitting at the kid's table, when my mother put our plates in front of us. We started eating. Then my mother exclaims, "Wait, we haven't prayed yet." Not trying to be obnoxious – it just came out – I said, "We don't pray." We didn't. We didn't pray before meals (at least not very often.)

But we went to church and Sunday School every Sunday. Even if Christmas fell on Sunday we went to church. We went to Christmas Eve worship service where even Santa himself would take a break from his work to come in for the end of the service. Mom took us to Vacation Bible School and all those other things at church.

At home, maybe we didn't pray before every meal (I don't know why. It just was.) but God was there and time with God was expected. Sometimes bedtime stories would come from the

classics like the "Three Bears" or "Rumpelstiltskin," but then there was this set {hold up} of books telling the Bible story. It just was.

My mom wasn't perfect. She isn't perfect. But she did all right. Look at me on a good day. Our home may not have been steeped in religious zeal, but God's presence was always assumed. Praying before meals is a good practice: I do it; but it's not some magic elixir. Everything we do teaches. Everything a mother does shapes her children. Everything we do affects our household and everyone in it.

Can we strive for godly homes, as imperfect as they may be? When we do, we may just discover the place that Jesus has prepared for us in the here and now. AMEN.