

In Honor of Mothers

Cradock Presbyterian Church

May 12, 2013

When I was in Seminary, our professors used to rail against “topical sermons.” In telling us about topical sermons, our professors almost without fail mentioned Mother's Day sermons as the next example of "topical sermons" to be avoided at all costs. Not that the professors were against Mother's Day, mind you; they suggested we do a regular sermon AND a separate message for the mother's. Do you really want to hear 2 sermons on one Sunday? I wouldn't!

So it's easy to assume that you can't preach a sermon about Mother's Day or on mothers that's biblical. That's a huge mistake. I want to tell you now – and SHOW you! – that the Bible does indeed speak about mothers, and speaks glowingly. That's why you heard the scriptures you just heard, and why this sermon can expound them and still do justice to this special day.

Let's start with creation. In the first chapter of Genesis, God begins creation with night and day, and concludes it by creating humans. The original language actually says he created "MANKind". NRSV changes it to "humankind", but that's not really necessary; verse 27 ends by saying "male *and female* he created THEM." The way he created them was in his own image. Did you get that? Both man AND woman are created in the image of God. That means that if anyone discounts, degrades, or downplays women, they are discounting, degrading, or downplaying the image of God.

Then what does the Bible say about the role of women? Along with men, they are told to "be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it". That means that women are intended to be mothers; so God intends for them to play a major part in his creation.

Humankind MUST grow in numbers in order to be able to subdue the earth; it's only when these relations between the material world and humans are established that other creatures can have a relationship to God, since all creatures were created by God for humankind. *Therefore*, being a mother means playing a major part in establishing the relationships of all things in this world with their maker. Without mothers, there would be no more people; without people, the earth wouldn't be subdued; and without these right relationships with God, the created order couldn't exist and flourish. Ladies, did you ever think that your role as mothers would be so important or so – cosmic?

As time went on, and Israel became a people, and then were led by Moses out of Egypt for the promised land, they would need order, to help them be God's people. God gave it to them by giving them laws, especially the Ten Commandments. You know, you can find the Ten Commandments in TWO places, in Exodus chapter 20, and also in the fifth chapter of Deuteronomy. I like the Deuteronomy passages, because they are a little more detailed about what God has in mind. When it comes to parents, the command from God is to "honor" them, "so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you." The word translated "honor" is a much more powerful word in the original: it means "to prize highly", "to show respect to", "to glorify and exalt", and even "to care for and show affection to". The same word here in the original is often used in the Old Testament to describe the proper response to God, and it includes the idea of worship. So the commandment tells us that we should value, respect, exalt, care for, show affection to, and maybe even worship our fathers and our mothers. If we do, God promises that our lives will be good. Why will they be good?

Because we'll live in harmony, and be doing the things we know God wants us to do. In my mind, that definitely points to mothers, because mothers have usually been the ones to teach us right and wrong, and how to get along with others. They can't very well teach us if we don't value what they say; we won't follow their example if we don't respect them; if we don't care for them and help them, they won't have the time to teach us; and if we don't show affection to them, we deny them their reward. Therefore we are obeying God's commandment when we put our mothers up there on that pedestal!

Okay, you've heard what the Old Testament has to say, let's go now to the New Testament. In the fifth chapter of I Timothy, there is a great verse that I'm glad I *didn't* discover when I was a teenager. The stinger is at the end: the young person's religious duty is to "make some repayment to their parents, for this is pleasing to God." When I was a teenager, I didn't have any money, so how could I repay anything? If I'd have read this, it would have worried me. But the original language is about more than money; it means more generically "to give back". Now that's something we can all do, because we can give back in so many ways. And you know what? The kinds of things we give back are usually exactly the things our mothers give to us. Mothers provide us with affection and warmth; mothers do the things we can't do for ourselves, and then they celebrate with us when we can finally do them. Mothers are usually the ones who are there when we stumble and fall, to reassure us; it's our mothers to whom we confide so much. You know, WE can be all of those things to our mothers. We can be their confidants; we can buck them up when they falter. We can go over and reset their digital

stuff every time the power fails; better yet, we really show our love when we keep showing *them* how to do it, and laugh with them when they get it right. We can show them the warmth and affection that they've shown us, and that they crave. Oh, you could probably think of lots of other ways to "give back" – let your imagination be the only limits!

We come to our final New Testament passage, and it's about time we heard from Jesus on the subject of mothers. When he was in his mortal agony – when his life was ebbing away on the cross – Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved and trusted the most, standing together near the cross. Looking down on them, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." And he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." What a terrific, powerful example for all of us! Jesus cared for his mother so much, that even in his anguish and pain, he took this opportunity to care for her, to make sure she was cared for. Almost all of us care deeply for our mothers, and would do anything for them. Yet there are some people out there who are callous, who would say, "You've got to live your own life," "you've got to be grown up," who would even accuse us males of being *weak* somehow, if we worry about or care for our mothers. I would simply point to Jesus on the cross, putting aside his own mortal suffering long enough to "give back" something to his own mother. Need we say more, to those who find it weak or unmanly?

The other part to this story from the foot of the cross is *the reaction* of Jesus' beloved disciple. "And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home." Without hesitation, that disciple accepted the task of loving and caring for Jesus' mother here on earth. That's a hard message to hear for us modern folks, even in thinking about our

own mothers. That disciple never hesitated to look out for someone else's mother. He honored mothers that much! He especially honored Mary. So WE should honor *all* mothers by looking out for them, by taking care of them. This is the highest form of honor, caring for mothers simply because they ARE mothers - even if they're not your own. It's sort of an extension of that Commandment we talked about earlier.

So, then, in honor of mothers, the Bible tells us that from the beginning God created women to fulfill an essential role in his creation, to be mothers to the multitudes that were to subdue the earth and establish relationships that were pleasing to God. From the beginning God knew that mothers would play the most important role in teaching and controlling the ethics and morality of the community, so it's no wonder that the first commandment that had to do with people, the fifth Commandment, insisted that they, along with fathers, be honored in every sense of the word. From the beginning of the Christian faith, preachers and apostles declared that we should honor mothers and fathers, but especially mothers, by "giving back" to them the things they need, or by "giving back" to the world in their honor. And at the very end of his life here on earth, Jesus insisted that we always care for our mothers, no matter what else goes on in our lives. So you see, there is an unbroken chain, all the way back to the creation of the world, of God commanding us to honor our mothers, and rewarding us in many ways when we do. You're just the latest link in the chain!

I want to share with you a personal story on this most personal of days. My grandmother and my mother had always had a rather "interesting" relationship; both of them could be, shall we say, "contentious" with each other, and there were periods of

time where they limited their contacts with each other. It was a couple of weeks before Christmas, a number of Christmases ago, when my grandmother, who had just turned 90, suffered a stroke and fell in her apartment, breaking her hip so badly that it had to be replaced. Worse, the stroke was so bad, there was almost unanimous opinion from her doctors that she would remain paralyzed for the rest of her life – a life they saw as very brief. She was in the hospital for a long, long time; when she came out, it was necessary for her to be placed in a nursing home. She was pathetic; she couldn't feed herself, she couldn't speak, she couldn't walk. Yet even with their past, my mother visited her, almost daily; consulted with her therapists; and to come and take her out of the home at least once a week, to give her a lift. She soon began talking; haltingly and almost unintelligibly at first; she began to get some movement back in her arms and hands. She got to where she could talk almost normally, though with some effort; she could also feed herself, though somewhat awkwardly. I believe that it was my mother's "giving back", my mother's "honoring" her in the fullest sense of the word, that brought about those miraculous changes. And when she died many years later, theirs was as strong a relationship as a mother and daughter can have. I talked about an "unbroken chain" of honoring mother and father; while I was sitting there writing this sermon, I remembered how my grandmother had cared for *her* parents, up to the end; and I remembered hearing how **THEY** cared for **THEIR** parents as well.

I pray that we can all remember these powerful, Biblical things, as we sit down to dinner with our mothers this Mother's Day; or as we call them to wish them a happy day;

or even as we just remember them. And I am SURE that all of us will work to strengthen that unbroken chain of honor to our mothers.