

*A Mother's Day Sermon*

We get a lot of what I would call junk mail at the church. These are often advertisements and product samples that we do not request. I think we get about as many direct mail solicitations for Mother's Day items, book and pins and such, as we do for Christmas and Easter. That is kind of strange because while the church is, or at least should be, very much in favor of mothers, and in the larger sense motherhood, Mother's Day is not a religious holiday per se.

A little bit of history: The roots of Mother's Day go back to the late 1800's. But it wasn't until 1914 that Mother's Day became an official holiday in the United states, making it less than 100 years old. The push for a national Mother's Day came from a woman named Anna Jarvis, with a healthy assist from retailer John Wanamaker. Jarvis' idea was that a day should be set aside to honor one's mother. However, Mother's Day became so commercialized, that Jarvis later said she regretted starting Mother's Day.

I myself have always been a little ambivalent about Mother's Day. True, everyone has a mother, but not every woman is a mother, and for some people that is painful: Some people do not have a relationship with their biological mother, and that too can be painful. Other people have bad, hurtful memories of their mothers. Fathers do not have a monopoly on toxic relationships with their children.

For many of us, our mothers are deceased. When I was growing up, you would wear a pink carnation on Mother's Day if your mother was alive and a white carnation if your mother had died. I'd be in the white carnation group today. All of those things can cast a pall over the joy of Mother's Day and we need to be sensitive to that. Some holidays when we rejoice, other may grieve. In our Mother's Day celebrations and prayers we should give thanks for all the faithful mothers who now rest from their earthly labors.

Still, I think that there is a very strong connection, both symbolically and in actuality, between motherhood and the faith of the church. That connection can guide and inform our proclamation today. Consider the wisdom, wonder and beauty of God's creation that includes mothers. God could have made human beings procreate by division like amoebas or hatch from an egg like reptiles, birds and insects, and with all our necessary knowledge and instincts bred into us so that that we would be independent and self-sufficient, and not need mothers. God could have ordered life that way.

Instead God in His wisdom choose for us an orderly family life for us to grow in. God choose for human beings to have a mother for love, care, and nurture. Not all maternal relationships reach that ideal. God's will, though, is for motherhood to be good, positive, and helpful. To have such a mother is a blessing. To be such a mother is to be a blessing.

There was a church that put on its outdoor sign for Mother's Day this quote: Virtue is learned at a mother's knee; vice is learned at some other joint. I like a good pun, and although blunt, and maybe kind of corny, it's true. God's has entrusted mothers with a tremendous responsibility to raise children in the knowledge, fear, and love of the Lord. Motherhood is a ministry and high calling. God can work through mothers so that their faith is transmitted one generation to the next. No doubt fathers have that same responsibility to pass on their Christian faith and values to their children. It is also said that the "hand that rocks the cradle rules the world," meaning that the future will be shaped by the values and morals we teach our children, including things like Christian family values and the Ten Commandments. We need to teach the Ten Commandments: they never go out of style.

The Ten Commandments specifically mentions mothers. The Fourth Commandment, as we Lutherans enumerate them, tells us to "Honor your father and your mother." That

means we should both obey them when we are young and care for them when they are old. When a child is taught to honor his mother and father in a Christian home, he will also learn to show respect for all God-ordained authority as he grows in years. We need that too. Putting in the time and effort for healthy family relations is so very important. Families are where children learn to be responsible adults. It is where children learn to be loving and respectful husbands and wives and mothers and fathers. These things must be taught.

Jesus had a mother whom he honored and respected. Jesus, as the Creed says, was born by the power of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary. We do not worship or pray to Mary. Through Christ we can approach God directly, without an intercessor. But Luther tells us that we should honor Mary above all other human beings because she consented to be the mother of our Savior. She is rightfully called by the Greek name “theotokos” which means Mother of God, in that she is the mother of Jesus, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

Mary may not have understood all the prophecies about her son and everything her son did during his earthly ministry. But Mary was a witness to Jesus’ crucifixion. As a dutiful son, from the cross Jesus provided for Mary to be cared for by the Apostle John after Jesus’ death. Jesus followed the Ten Commandments. Mary was also a witness to the Resurrection; she was one of the women of the group that the two disciples going to Emmaus mentioned to the stranger that turned out to be Jesus. And she was there on the first Christian Pentecost. In the many ways Mary experienced Jesus’ life and grace, and expressed her faith, she is a symbol and type of the Christian Church.

Sometimes the Christian church is called “Mother Church.” Regarding the church, it is said, “Whoever wants God for his Father, must have the Church for his Mother.” We call God “Father” Jesus called God “Father.” He never called God “Mother.” Just as Earthly

mothers and fathers are complimentary but different -- they are not the same – it is similar with our Heavenly Father and our Mother the Church. God is not the Church and the Church is not God, but their relationship is complimentary. God loves the church, supports her, and sacrifices for her. And the Church loves, honors, and obeys God. We Christians are the children of Mother Church and Father God. We do well to honor both our Father and our Mother.

The calling and function of the church, our spiritual mother, can be seen in the story of the two disciples on their way to Emmaus. Today some people are fond of calling churches “Christian communities,” and there, on the road to Emmaus you have the most basic form of Christian community: two disciples and Christ. In that minimalistic congregation the Word was present. Jesus expounded on the Holy Scriptures to them. There was also the sacrament of a sort. Jesus was known to them in the breaking of bread. That experience of word and sacrament in community, that church, gave birth to faith in the two unnamed disciples as they came from confusion to trust and belief in the risen Lord.

In that same way, through Word and sacrament, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, faith is being birthed and nurtured in us in the church today. So it’s a very good thing for you to visit Mother Church on Mother’s Day and every Sunday, “Come to Papa. Come to Father God.” And “Come to Mama. Come to Mother Church.” You’ll be glad you did, because this is where salvation is. This is where healing and forgiveness are. Amen.