A.M.D.G. Mother’s Day Texts: Proverbs 31

 May 13th, 2018 Ephesians 3

Ephesians 3 14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. 16I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, 17and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. 18I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, 21to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

‘M’ Is For …..

Perhaps you have heard this poem by Howard Johnson:

 **M** is for the million things she gave me;

 **O** means only that she’s growing older;

 **T** is for the tears she shed to save me;

 **H** is for the heart of purest gold;

 **E** is for her eyes with love light shining;

 **R** is right – and right she’ll always be.

 Put them all together and they spell MOTHER

 A word that means the world to me.

Many ministers, myself included – approach the 2nd Sunday in May with a certain amount of caution and trepidation. Mother’s Day is often fraught with high expectation. There are lots of wonderful moms here today. Moms in traditional families. Moms in special circumstances. Single moms. Step-moms. Step-*in* moms. And you all ***deserve*** breakfast in bed. Lunch in bed, too, if you want. Flowers. Chocolates. Gifts. You deserve all of it and more!

Still, in my version of the poem, ‘M’ stands for mixed feelings, because no human mom fulfills her role as perfectly as the mom in the poem. Let’s face it – it’s not all Hallmark cards and breakfast in bed. Mother’s Day can also stir up feelings of grief and loss and pain for many. We may yearn for the mother we’ve lost – or the mother we wish had been there for us. We may grieve for children who are absent, or ones we’ve never had the opportunity to have.

-2-

And many of those cards on the store shelves? They almost all portray an idealized version of the perfect mom. You know –

- the one who keeps the perfect home and is the perfect wife;

- the one who sets the perfect table and is the perfect hostess;

- the one who raises the perfect kids.

A recent TV survey on Good Morning, America asked viewers to list their three top television moms of the last several decades. The gold medal went to Claire Huxtable of The Cosby Show. Silver went to Marian Cunningham from Happy Days. The bronze medal went to Marge Simpson of The Simpsons.

Claire was always impeccably dressed despite having six children. She kept a spotless home while pursuing a prestigious, full time career. And laughed at all her husband's jokes. Marian Cunningham looked good in an apron and was always smiling. Marge - well, she married Homer. What more can you say? She was longsuffering and patient – and put up with a lot without complaining. How can real life moms live up to all of that?

So in my version, ‘M’ is for mixed feelings.

Even the Bible sets a high, if not impossible, standard for moms. In the 31st chapter of the book of Proverbs – a passage often read on Mother’s Day – we hear: *“A good wife, who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. She rises while it is still night, and provides food for her household. She considers a field and buys it, and plants a vineyard. Her lamp does not go out at night.* *She opens her hands to the poor. She makes linen garments and sells them. She opens her mouth with wisdom and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed. Her husband also.”*

I mean – who can live up to that?!!! If anyone deserves breakfast in bed once a year – it is this woman! So – ‘M’ is for mixed feelings.

And yet – sentimentality and unrealistic expectations aside – I think it is still a day worth saving. Mothers, for many people, have had a deep influence; have been wonderful – if sometimes flawed – role models; and have nurtured, cared for, and loved without reservation, sometimes in spite of ourselves. And we shouldn’t take that for granted. If you are fortunate to have a mom in your life like that, it’s good to stop at least once a year to say a heartfelt thank you and to show appreciation for the blessing they have been.

-3-

And Mother’s Day also gives us the opportunity to express our love and gratitude to all the *other* women in our lives who have cared for us – grandmothers, teachers and mentors, friends and elders, role models and people we look up to who have nurtured us, inspired us, challenged us to be the best we can be, and helped us to grow as a person.

Yesterday, I so appreciated an email from Ibi Chuan, whom some of you met last year when I was supervising him as he prepared for ordination. He’s now serving his first church in Cranbrook, BC – and wrote to thank me for being his ‘Mama Bear’ – for guiding him, supporting him during some challenges he faced, and mentoring him along the way. I really appreciated hearing from him and being remembered in that way.

And we can also give thanks on this Mother’s Day for others who have mothered us – who are not necessarily women. The traditional characteristics associated with mothering – nurturing, caring, supporting, guiding, loving, listening and gently holding our fears, our tears and our joys – can also be found in some of the significant men in our lives.

In a story in Robert Fulghum’s book *‘It Was On Fire When I Lay Down On It’* he gives some advice to his sons about mothering. He writes, “My son is a mother. Grown up, married, first child. He and his wife have full-time careers and believe in equal rights and equal responsibility, in the spirit of new parenthood. My son does his full share of everything for his daughter, and spends as much time with the child as his wife does. I call him a ‘mother’ in that he does all those things that, once upon a time, mostly mothers did. He feeds, cleans, and dresses, nurtures, accepts, approves, encourages, protects, comforts, and dearly love the babe in his arms and heart. And I admire him for this.

His daughter is just a year old. So far, so good. But since there are quite a few more laps to go, I thought I should give my son some advice about being a mother. Advice for him, not his wife. Let me explain …. For 25 years of my life, the 2nd Sunday in May was trouble. Being the minister of a church, I was obliged in some way to address the subject of Mother’s Day. It could not be avoided. I tried that. The congregation was really quite open-minded and usually gave me free rein in the pulpit. But when it came to the 2nd Sunday in May, the expectations were summarized in these words of one of the more outspoken women in the church. *“I’m bringing my* ***MOTHER*** *to church on* ***MOTHER’S DAY,*** *Reverend, and you can talk about anything you want. But it had better include* ***MOTHER****, and it had better be* ***GOOD****!”* She was joking, of course – teasing me. She also meant it! And I knew it.

-4-

Year after year I tried to get it right. I did give it my best – I swear. Tried to deliver on-the-one hand sort of balanced, evasive sermons. Quoted a lot of big-name authorities, read sensitive poetry, avoided chancy jokes and gratuitous advice. But the Sunday never passed without half the congregation thinking I was a hypocrite for not laying it on the line about mothers, and the other half thinking I was an ingrate for not laying it on with a trowel as to how wonderful mothers really, eternally, are. What’s a minister to do? One year, a visiting lady, who had ‘sainted mother’ written all over her face, accosted me after church. *“Young man,” she stormed, “better men than you have gone straight to hell for suggesting less than what you said this morning. Shame, shame, SHAME, for spoiling this day!” (*Just as an aside – I had a similar experience happen to me one Mother’s Day, so I can really identify with what he’s saying!)

Fulghum goes on to say, “My Sunday obligations are over now, and my mother is in her grave. I am on safer ground in passing some advice on to my son, the mother. Advice for his older brother as well, who is engaged and has that look about him that tells me motherhood is not far away from him, either.

For both my sons, then – some motherly thoughts from their father:

1. Children are not pets;

2. The life they actually live and the life you perceive them to be living is not the same life;

3. Don’t take what your children do too personally;

4. Don’t keep scorecards on them – a short memory is useful;

5. Dirt and mess are a breeding ground for well-being;

6. Stay out of their rooms after puberty;

7. Stay out of their friendships and love-life unless invited in;

8. Don’t worry that they never listen to you. Worry that they are always watching you;

9. Learn from them; they have much to teach you;

10. Love them long; let them go early.

As I write this, Mother’s Day is coming around again. I must remember to send my son some flowers and a card.

**‘M is for the many mother-figures in our lives’** So – on this Mother’s Day, let us honour them – whoever they are – past or present, in memory or in person, biological or spiritual. And in doing so, honour the God who creates us to be in relationship with one another – caring, loving and nurturing the people who bless our lives, and celebrating the deep bonds of love that connect us heart to heart. Amen – so may it be.