

Sermon for May 14, 2017

Mother's Day

"Mothers All"

Ephesians 1:15-23

Mark 3:31-35

One day the worship committee of First United Methodist Church of Somewhere, SC 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 and grandchildren etc. present in church. They also decided to have all the mothers stand. Then someone on the committee got worried. "What should we do about Miss Smith? She never had any children. But she has been teaching the first grade Sunday School class for 30 years. She is like a mother to all of us. We ought to be able to recognize her on Mother's Day?"

The Worship Committee of First Church 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 you have any children or not. Miss Smith of First Church Somewhere 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 you 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 Smith and Jane Doe. And 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. Not just those who are growing physically, but to those who are growing spiritually. In Christ we are all foster fathers and mothers for God's children. So today we honor all women in the church, because in God's eyes you are mothers all.

"Oh that sounds sweet: the preacher says all the women in the church are mothers." You don't understand! It's not sweet. Being a mother is hard. You don't know what you have gotten yourselves into. In the last few Sundays you have adopted an infant and 10 teenagers! I don't know about being a mother, but I have had twenty plus 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.

I know; being a parent is not easy. People told me that the early years were the easy part. They were right. It got harder when my children became teenagers. Now as young adults I have to 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 sin. 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 you women, as mothers in God's eyes, have signed yourself 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, and 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 mean time we need to prepare our children in the faith to face the world. We need to help them claim and learn how to use the armor of Christ. To train them in spiritual warfare. So that they would 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 our 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." In this passage Paul gives thanks for the faith and love of the Ephesians. Obviously they were a people who had great faith in Jesus. And obviously 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 begins to pray for them. He prays that they receive a spirit of wisdom and revelation. He also prays that the eyes of their hearts be enlightened so that they may know of the hope they have in Christ.

It is important to note what it is he wants them to see. He wants 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 the church. I remember the love and nurture of many of them. There was my own mother of course. Her example of faith and devotion had a great effect on me. She is one of the reasons I am a disciple of Christ today. But there were many others. One I remember particularly, and have mentioned her before, was Mrs. Melia. Joe and Hazel Melia never had any children; at least not biological ones. But Mrs. Melia led two children's choirs and a youth choir for decades. She was a mother to every child in that church who could carry a tune, and a good number who couldn't. She helped raise me in the faith. The songs of the faith that she taught me helped me to grow and to fight the spiritual battles that I needed to fight for myself.

I give thanks for Christian mothers, but I also pray for you. You need the insight to know what is true and good. You need the patience to persevere. You need the grace to be forgiving when little hands and feet do what they shouldn't. You need the faith to know that a point comes when you can't do anything and that it is all in the Lord's hands.

I also pray for you to have 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 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.