

Sermon for May 8, 2016
Mother's Day
"Are You My Mother?"

2 Timothy 1:5-10

My mother used to read books to me. Among my favorite books I remember one entitled "Are You My Mother." A mother bird sees that her egg is about to hatch so she flies off to get a worm for it to eat when it is hatched. But in the mean time the egg hatches and the little bird begins looking for its mother. It wanders up to various things and animals and asks "Are you my mother?" At one point it even thinks that a steam shovel could be its mother. Finally it finds its mother and the story ends.

Well, today is Mother's day. Are you my mother? What I mean is "in the faith" who are our mothers? Who are the women who have taught us and influenced our faith to grow?

Today I want us to identify those women. Paul identified Timothy's mother and grandmother as those who raised him in the faith. Timothy's father was a Gentile. As a result he was not circumcised and taken to the synagogue each Sabbath. But his Jewish mother Lois and grandmother Eunice still taught him about the one true God and prepared him for the day when he heard that the Messiah had come. Their faith was instilled in him and enabled him to give his life to Christ. Who are the Loises and Eunices in your life?

My first Lois would have to be my mother. She was not a leader in the church although she did once serve as an organist. She didn't sit me down and make me read the Bible. She never preached to me. But she witnessed through her life.

My mother suffered through the deaths of both of her parents before I was 4. She struggled through mental illness, through my own illnesses (I almost died as an infant), through emphysema, family difficulties and heart disease. But she kept her faith. Her quiet witness taught me that through all things God can strengthen us. Even when we are weak and weary, God can take our burdens and sustain us.

Another mother in the faith was my sister. My sister is not what you would call a traditional Christian. She is more of a free spirit. Sometimes her theology strays far from orthodoxy. But in reality she is all over the Christian spectrum: she was even a Roman Catholic for a while and then a member of a Unity Church. She likes pushing the envelope.

But I can remember how she influenced me early on. When I was 8 years old I watched a Billy Graham crusade and really heard and understood for the first time that each person has to make a decision to follow Christ or not. After I finished watching Billy Graham and went to my sister and asked her what she thought. She simply said, "I gave my life to Christ." That simple answer was a profound testimony.

Now, often we disagree on particular theological points. But her spirit of inquisitiveness has influenced me. Willingness to explore new ways of understanding has helped me to grow in faith.

Another woman who was a mother in the faith to me was Hazel Melia. Mrs. Melia was the music director at the church I grew up in. As you can guess music played an important role in my spiritual development. Much of my faith has been shaped by Christian music. Mrs. Melia directed the children's choirs, one youth choir and two adult choirs all while also being the organist. Joe and Hazel Melia never had any children; at least not biological ones. But Mrs. Melia 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.

Her dedication to Christ and her love of worship influenced me. And the songs she taught

me helped me to know God. Those songs have stuck with me through the years. We did a whole youth cantata based on the verse "Greater is he that is in me than he that is in the world." I didn't understand what that meant but later in life when I ran into the world, I knew I had a power of Christ in me greater than any in the world.

Another member of my home church who was a mother in the faith was Nancy Vanderford. I remember one of my friends told me that there was a new teacher teaching the 8th grade Sunday School class. She said this new teacher actually delved into the Bible in class. I attended Sunday school voluntarily for the first time and she did. She tried to answer the questions we had including some controversial ones based on the Bible.

From Mrs. Vanderford I learned a deep knowledge and respect for the Bible. She was the first person to actively help me delve into the Word of God and seek meaning from it. Her faith in what she called "God's Love letter to the human race" has influence all the Bible studies I have taught since.

Another mother in the faith is my own wife Melissa. She grew up as a Baptist. I like to say that you can take the girl out of the church but you can't take the church out of the girl. She is proof that Baptists make good Methodists.

One example of her teaching me is that when we first met I was uncomfortable with altar calls. Like most mainline Christians I thought it was something that should be reserved for special services designed to call the unsaved to salvation, for revivals and such. It didn't make sense to me to have an altar call when the message of the day was to guide or strengthen believers. But Melissa showed me that praying at the altar is not just for the newly saved but for all Christians. She helped me understand and embrace the Methodist tradition of the Invitation to Christian Discipleship. That tradition of praying at the Altar, I discovered, is deeply rooted in the Methodist Heritage. Methodists were known for kneeling in prayer. Accounts of their worship often include praying at the altar before and during the service. My formerly Baptist wife helped me to embrace that Methodist tradition.

But more than that her basic faith in the face of adversity has inspired me. Even when doors were shut in her face because of her disabilities she did not lose heart. In faith she persevered and trusted in the Lord.

Ironically enough my daughters are also mothers in the faith to me. As they have matured in their faith it has informed, inspired and even challenged my growth in faith. As they have asked questions, I have had to ask those same questions of myself. As they have sought to serve God, I have been inspired to serve God with new depth. As they have dedicated themselves in devotion, it has reminded me to constantly renew my devotion.

Now to see them going off on their own and discovering their calling and vocation, has inspired me in my vocation.

I praise God as I remember the faith of these women who are my mothers in the faith. Who are the women who have been your mothers in the faith? The list might start with your mother, but may include sisters and friends and teachers and even daughters. What lessons have they taught you about being a child of God? What examples of faith have they given you? What Christian values have they instilled in your heart?

Remember their witness. Thank God for the testimony of their lives. Celebrate the faith that they have helped to grow in you.

Then live it. Live the faith they have. Let what they have taught you lead you in your Christian walk. Rekindle the faith planted in your heart by their Christian witness.

Maybe you can begin by coming to the altar to thank God for your mothers in the faith.