

“MOM’S DAY”
Proverbs 31:10-31
preached on May 10, 2009

I’m upset with Congress. That’s not all that new or exciting. I can get mad at Congress quite easily. Always could. Call it a gift. I don’t like the rate at which they accumulate my money, and I certainly don’t like the rate at which they spend my money. I don’t like the salaries and perks that they have given themselves. I don’t like it when they exempt themselves from rules that they require us to follow. And I don’t like the way they pass certain bills. Often they mean well, at least I think they do, but most of the time they just seem to operate like they’re just bricks shy of a full load, an eight cylinder engine operating on five. Today is a case in point. They called this day ‘Mother’s Day.’ It is a good idea to have a day to honor the female parent. History has a long line of sayings; “The Lord could not be everywhere, so God created mothers. An ounce of mother is worth a pound of clergy.” And Charles Dickens wrote, “I think it must be somewhere written that the virtues of the mothers shall be visited on their children, as well as the sins of the fathers.”

Mothers are the ones who raise the next generation. They are our first teachers. They taught us all sorts of lessons for life. For instance:

My mother taught me about ANTICIPATION ... *“Just wait until your father gets home.”*

My mother taught me about RECEIVING ... *“You are going to get it when we get home!”*

My mother taught me to MEET A CHALLENGE ... *“What were you thinking? Answer me when I talk to you!”*
“But I...” “Don’t talk back to me!”

My mother taught me LOGIC ... *“If you fall off that swing and break your neck, you are not going to the store with me.”*

My mother taught me MEDICAL SCIENCE ... *“If you don’t stop crossing your eyes they are going to freeze that way.”*

My mother taught me to THINK AHEAD ... *“If you don’t pass your spelling test you will never get a good job.”*

My mother taught me ESP ... *“Put your sweater on; don’t you think I know when you’re cold?”*

My mother taught me HUMOR ... *“When that lawn mower cuts off your toes, don’t come running to me.”*

My mother taught me how to BECOME AN ADULT ... *“If you don’t eat your vegetables you’ll never grow up.”*

My mother taught me about SEX ... *“How do you think you got here?”*

My mother taught me about GENETICS ... *“You’re just like your father.”*

My mother taught me about my ROOTS ... *“Do you think you were born in a barn?”*

My mother taught me about the WISDOM OF AGE ... *“When you get to be my age, you will understand.”*

And most of all, my mother taught me about JUSTICE ... *“One day you’ll have kids of your own, and I hope they turn out just like you. Then you’ll see what it’s like.”*

So the action by Congress to declare this day “Mother’s Day” would seem to be fitting and proper. So, you may ask why I have such a problem with it. The problem is that Congress has not gone far enough. They called this day Mother’s Day. But every person can only have one mother. That is so restrictive and so limited. It is even more limited when you consider the number of other adult females who might have had a positive influence on your life. Therefore, I have decided to take the matter into my own hands. I declare today to be >Mom’s Day.’ You may wonder what the difference is between a Mother and a Mom. According to my interpretation, one is a female who has biologically given birth. The other is a female who through love, care, and concern has taken an interest in the life and well being of another. Where in the first category you can have only one, in the other, you can have lots and lots.

I’ve had a number of Mom’s in my life, including my own mother. Not everyone’s mother is a mom. And not all moms are mothers. I came to this defining conclusion some years ago. I was at Annual Conference when one of my mentors and friend Rev. Stephanie Sechrist introduced me as one of her kids. The person was surprised to think that I was her offspring since I am less than 10 years younger than her, but I knew what she really meant. Once upon a time I was one of her students at Vacation Bible School Class in my home church. She has been a spiritual mom for me. I could always go to her for advice, for information, or just to talk. Particularly when I first started to follow my calling, I could go to her to receive answers to my questions and ease my stress. She helped keep me sane. Stephanie is one of my moms.

Another is Millie Bowen, and I know that many of you know her. She might even have been one of your moms. I first met her at Camp Penn. It seemed that whenever I went to Camp Penn, Millie would be there as a counselor. And she was a good counselor. Even when my cousins and I would play the game of seeing how far rules could bend without breaking, Millie was calm, fun loving, and caring. You realize, of course, that when I was a director at that same camp that I did not allow campers to bend rules nearly as far as my cousins and I did. We knew most of the tricks and probably even invented a couple. My greatest fear as a camp director was that I would have a group come in like the group I traveled with. But Millie took it all in stride. Millie was our camp Mom, not a counselor as much as our camp Mom. But then, Millie was a mom to a lot of kids because of the time she has spent and the energy she has given to help give youth direction, and sometimes just giving kids a chance, any chance is important. Millie was a mom. And there have been other moms in my life - Judith Kipp, Evelyn Zeigler, Luella Gurtizen, Lu March, and the list goes on and on.

The Bible knows about moms. There are several moms in the Bible. And Proverbs tells us some things about moms. The Revised Standard Version calls her a good wife, but other translations refer to this person as a virtuous woman, an individual of honor and wealth. In the Hebrew it is a description of a woman who is not only strong, virtuous, and capable, but she is the epitome of ancient Israelite womanhood. She fulfills the human potential God intended from the beginning of creation. Some might be troubled with that statement because this passage is perceived by many to advocate total domesticity for women. Those who view it that way are forgetting how different the ancient Israelite home was from a house in the American suburbs in 1955. The household of this virtuous woman is more like a frontier homestead, where the farm is not only your home, but the center of the economy and the culture. The work done there and on other neighboring farms form the core of life.

How does the Bible view women? I like the interpretation that comes from Linda Stover in *AWomen in Christianity*.” She writes, *“You see, my understanding of the ‘traditional’ role of women in the Bible is not quite as simple as most. I believe women must be submissive, yet militant. Humble, yet proud. Meek, yet aggressive. All of these apparent contradictions are found in the Bible. Read the stories of Deborah, Ruth, the virtuous woman in Proverbs, and Mary, the mother of Jesus. You don’t find them hiding in the shadows of men. Instead you find them doing what God called them to do in spite of tradition and circumstances. Humble, submissive and meek before [God]. Yet never shirking their duty. Proud of their calling. Aggressively carrying out His will. Not yielding to tradition that would hold them back.”* It is such women who make not just good mothers, but great moms.

Moms do what is best for the people in their lives. Moms are the backbone of all sorts of organizations. I was surprised to read part of a study that came out of Duke University. It said that when it comes to volunteering, today’s women are more likely to volunteer than their mothers were at the same age. The study goes on to say that women who volunteer the most, have part-time jobs, working 20 hours a week or less. Now that didn’t

surprise me. But the next highest group of volunteers were women who work outside the home 50-60 hours a week. Though they have no time to give, still they volunteer. Moms and women make the whole world work. They give their time, talents, and gifts. They organize and sacrifice. And they do it all with a sense of compassion. It is no wonder that the Bible calls them more valuable than rubies. Rubies just sit there. But women, mothers and moms bring forth life. They aid in the growth toward maturity.

Moms work with eager hands, even when the hands are really not that eager, moms will still work. Where a child or a man can ignore most everything around them, a mom will come in and begin to work. They see things that need to be done and then start doing them. Men, for the most part have no concept of how dishes, clothing, or toilets are cleaned. It is some miraculous process. As if by magic I leave my dirty socks in the middle of the floor and in a short time they are clean and neatly folded in the drawer from which they came. Women will ask, "Didn't you see what needed to be done?" And men in all honesty will answer, "Huh? What needed to be done?" We don't even know what work was done after it was done. But moms do. Moms make life happen. They feed us. Clothe us. Guide and direct us. And what do we do in return? The least we can do is to celebrate and honor them on this Moms Day. We can celebrate those who gave us life and also those who have helped and enriched our lives along the way.

Proverbs say that moms get up while it is still dark to provide food for her family. When I was still living in the home where I grew up, Mom always made sure that we had food to eat, and sometimes that was not an easy task. We ate like pigs but the food was always there. Back then, there were a couple of years when I had jobs where I had to rise early, when it was still dark. I never liked that. I prefer to sleep late which is a trait I picked up from Mom. But even though she would have preferred to sleep, she would get up at 5 or so to make sure that I got a decent breakfast and to pack my lunch. I never really appreciated that until the time came when Mom was no longer there to do such things.

Out of her earnings she plants a vineyard that we might be strengthened and nourished. She sets about her work vigorously; working days, nights, weekends and all because she never sees a time when nothing more needs to be done. Her arms are strong for her tasks. Forget that weaker sex myth. I believe that if men had to go through the labor of childbirth, the human race would have ended before it ever got started. But moms are tough, quick, sometimes sneaky, and they usually persevere.

Her lamp does not go out at night. She waits to make sure the kids are home, safe, no matter how old those kids are. She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy. Where would churches be without women? Without moms? Where would any volunteer group be? We depend on women to do the work. In most churches, just try to compare the work of the women to the work of the men. One group brings energy and activity; they bring comfort, compassion, grace, and relief, both near and far. The other group struggles to feed themselves regularly.

When it snows she has no fear for her household because Mom is the one who checks on clothing, who makes sure it is fit and warm enough. Kids and fathers have no clue about such things. Day care workers and teachers can look over their kids and know instinctively which were washed and dressed by fathers, and which ones look OK. I have often said that a sweater is something you put on when your mother gets cold. They know what is best.

Perhaps the toughest thing for moms is to know when it is time to let go. It is the desire of every mom to keep their child from the hurts and pains that come with life. Yet it is often through those personal pains that the younger ones learn to grow and mature, that hearts and minds are transformed, that we might turn toward

compassion and grace. There comes a time when the parent must back away so the child can fight their own battles, earn their own victories, and make their own mistakes; a time when the child will be a child no longer, but an adult making their way in the world.

Sometimes I’ve been asked if it was tough to let my kids leave home after high school. No. Have you met my kids? But the truth is that this is what we’ve raised our children to do. To leave. To go out on their own. We raise our children to be independent, and sometimes it is extremely frustrating that they have turned out that way. I want them to be like me. To think like me. But they are not me. They have to be themselves, and though it drives me nuts sometimes, I am most proud, and I think God is most pleased, when they live out who we raised them to be, and who God created them to be.

Though they go out on their own, that child is never abandoned. A bird will push the baby out of the nest, but then will follow to make sure they can fly. When there are problems, and there will be, the child is always welcomed back into the nest, into the home, into where they can be nurtured, into Mom’s welcoming arms. But the time must come when the bird is pushed out of the nest time and time again, until they can fly on their own. It can be tough, but that is what loving Moms do. And they need to have that toughness to make that child independent, for there may very well come a time when a mom becomes a child once again. The child has to be prepared so that if and when that time comes, they are able to give the care that is needed. And mom has to be prepared to receive that care, that compassion, that grace that in word and deed, they had once taught the child, that the child can now offer to them. For what they have done, for all they taught us to do, moms should be honored today.

Moms speak with wisdom and power, with compassion and grace. If we are wise, we will listen to them. Honor and celebrate them in our presence. Proverbs tells us that there are many women who do noble things, but it is the Moms in your life who surpass them all. A Mom who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her the respect she has earned. Give her the reward she deserves. Do it this day and do it every day. To all you Moms out there, happy Mom’s Day. You deserve it.