

Mother's Day & Christian Family Sunday

May 9, 2021

Mark 3:20-21, 31-35

It was late in the evening and a wife noticed that her husband was standing looking down at their baby's crib. As she stood there silently watching, she noticed that a whole host of emotions could be read on his face; disbelief, scepticism and amazement. He repeatedly stood back, shook his head and said "amazing", all the while beaming from ear to ear. The woman was deeply moved by his rather unusual display of emotions. She quietly entered the room and put her arms around his waist and whispered: "A penny for your thoughts?". And what was his reply? "Isn't it amazing! When you take the time, really look close and think about it, how can anyone make a crib that like that that sells for only \$200!"

There can be no doubt about it, mothers and fathers can be very different! Today of course is Mother's Day and this is the one day of the year when, if we can, we are to show our love for our mothers and let them know how much they mean to us. Some people of course think that Mother's Day is just another ploy to get people to spend money and perhaps it has become a bit too commercialized. Even so, the intent is good. Mothers like to know that they are loved and appreciated, but of course what goes for mothers also goes for the rest of us as well.

Some time ago I read an interesting article about the changes that we go through as we age, and the author noted how our needs change as we go through life's stages. Babies for example are totally dependent upon their mothers and others for absolutely everything; food, warmth and protection. Babies couldn't possibly survive without adults to protect and provide for them. But then, as the infant grows older, their needs change. While the child is still dependant upon adults for protection and the necessities of life, he or she also needs more. The child needs to be taught life's skills for example. The child also needs to be socialized too and this includes having good role models to follow. And on it goes. What a teenager needs in life is very different from what a person in his or her seventies needs. And yet, as the author said, there is one constant or need in life that never ever changes; that is the need to be loved and to know that we matter.

It makes no difference whether we be a newborn, ninety-nine years old or somewhere in-between, we all need to be loved and to know that our lives are of value to someone. This is *the* one constant through all of life's stages and that is the message of this old Irish poem:

“Am I a burden, now I am old?
My deaf ears force you to shout.
My wobbly legs force you to clean for me.
My bent fingers force you to sew for me.
My twisted back forces you to dress me.
My fading eyes force you to lead me.
My toothless mouth forces you to make soup for me.
Yet you tell me you love me.
You enjoy listening to my stories.
You ask me my advice.
You make me feel important.
I still need to be needed.
If you are deceiving me,
God bless you for your deception.

No matter how old or young we are, we all still need to be loved and valued or, to put it another way, we need to be part of a family, however we may define that term.

In recent years there has been a lot of debate about what constitutes a family and even when we have decided what a family is, what qualities or characteristics make it a Christian family? There are many answers to these questions but perhaps the best one is to be found in today's scripture passage.

One day while Jesus was in a house teaching, there was a bit of a commotion outside. His mother and brothers had come looking for him and wanted him to come home. But what was Jesus' response?

He said that whoever does the will of God is his brother, sister, and mother. And as Jesus said at numerous other times, more than anything else, God's will is that we love. Yes, Jesus knew that our family are those whom we live with or are related to but in effect what he did was broaden the definition of family. Our family is everyone whom we love and since we are supposed to love everyone, that means that ultimately everyone is a member of our family! Of course, some people might object that this all sounds so very nice in theory but to be realistic,

we can't even like everyone else, never mind love them! But what we have to remember though is what Jesus meant by the word love.

According to the gospels, when Jesus said that we should love one another, he used a very specific word; agape. Now the word agape does not refer to a romantic type of love at all. In fact agape doesn't even require that we like the other person. What agape does require however is that we seek what is best for the person. And this, as the Bible understands it, is what love is. Love is more than a feeling; it is a choice or conscious decision. Now this is not for one moment to deny the reality of the love we have for such as our children, or the passion of romantic love as expressed in the words of a song, "I can't help falling in love with you". And yet while such feelings may start or kindle a relationship, they cannot sustain it. The love only lasts if we choose to love, and this is acknowledged in the marriage service.

Imagine for a moment a couple who are about to be married standing in front of the minister. What brought them to this point? They are of course, sometimes wildly so, in love with one another. The marriage service however strives to move beyond the romance and that is the whole point of the vows. The couple join hands and then, one after the other, repeat:

"I _____, now take you _____, to be my wife/husband, according to God's holy ordinance; to share my life, from this day forward, whether better or worse, whether richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, to be faithful to you alone, for as long as we both shall live; and now, to you and to God, I make this solemn vow and promise."

Obviously, there is nothing in the least bit romantic about these vows or promises; in fact they are supremely realistic. The couple may be hopelessly romantically in love at the time of their wedding, but there will be days when the sun won't shine and the skies will be grey. Even so, they promise that they will still love one another. And as it is with our spouses or significant others, so it is with all of the important people in our lives whether they be our children, grandchildren, parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters. In fact this is the way it should be with everyone else too; we choose to love the people around us. Is it always easy to do this? No. In fact sometimes it can be very hard, especially when we feel hurt, disappointed or let down. If or when we feel this way though, perhaps we should think of God and Jesus himself.

I sometimes wonder if we talk and sing about the love of God and Christ so much, that we take it for granted. What we must always remember though is that there is nothing inevitable about God's love for us at all. God did not have to love the world so much that he gave his one and only son; he chose to. Jesus did not have to die on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins and our salvation; he chose to. And God and Christ have chosen to love us, not because we deserve it or are so loveable; rather they have chosen to love us despite our failures and shortcomings. And so it is with us. We are called to try and make a conscious choice or decision to see the best in other people and to seek what is best for them, despite their failures, shortcomings or how 'unlovable' they may seem to be. And in the end, love is what it is all about. One person who certainly knew this was St Paul. As he famously wrote:

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I am only a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have all knowledge, and a faith so as to move mountains but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have and deliver my body to the flames but have not love, I gain nothing."

But because we have chosen to love, we gain everything. Our decision to try and love others just as we are loved by God himself, is what we affirm on this Mother's Day and Christian Family Sunday.

Pastoral Prayer

Gracious God, hear us now as we come to you in prayer on this Mother's Day and Christian Family Sunday.

On this day when we remember not only our mothers but all of the people so dear to us, we give you thanks for all that they have meant, mean and always will mean to us. We thank you too for the many ways that love comes into our lives, and help us we pray, to love even as we are loved.

We pray for all for whom this is a day of pain. We pray for those who so desperately miss a loved one. We pray for those estranged from family members

for whatever reason. We pray for relationships where distrust has replaced trust, where love and affection have been replaced by indifference or worse.

We pray for all who are feeling overwhelmed by what is happening in the world around them, fearing for their own health or that of a loved one, their livelihoods and the very future itself.

When we feel overwhelmed by it all, help us to put our faith, our trust, and our hope in you. Grant us and all your children, the strength, courage, and peace that only you can.

We ask these things in your Son's name.

Amen