

## Message for May 8, 2022

### Mother's Day & Christian Family Sunday

#### **Ephesians 5:21-30, 6:1-4**

As we all well know today is Mother's Day, and with this in mind I thought that it would be interesting if today's message focused on some of the great mothers of the Bible.

Looking at the Bible, the first famous mother is probably Rebecca who was married to Isaac and was the mother of Jacob and Esau. Is she really a good advertisement for motherhood though? Rebecca after all was the one who blatantly favoured one son over the other and even hatched the scheme where Jacob, by pretending to be his older brother Esau, gained the family estate. No, I decided that Rebecca really isn't the sort of mother we want to affirm on this special day. I then turned to the New Testament and thought about the greatest mother of all who is of course Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary is said by many to be *the* example of faith and motherhood and yet even Mary apparently had her doubts about Jesus; how else can we explain the time when she, along with other members of the family, sought to take Jesus home because they thought that he was beside himself, which is the Bible's way of saying that they thought he was mentally ill.

No, I decided that I wouldn't preach about great mothers of the Bible this morning but then I had another idea. Today isn't just Mother's Day; within the church, today is also Christian Family Sunday. I decided then that I'd talk about the great families of the Bible, but I soon discovered that the great families are far and few between. We can think of the very first family in the Bible, Adam, Eve, Cain and Able. They were disobedient, deceiving, jealous, and one brother even killed the other. Hardly a great example! I then thought of Jacob. Jacob wanted to marry Rachel but was duped into marrying her sister Leah instead. When Jacob was finally allowed to marry his beloved Rachel, they were anything but a happy family. The two sisters were jealous of one another and their kids hated one another. To make things worse, Jacob blatantly favoured Rachel's offspring. After Jacob gave Joseph the coat of many colours the result was Joseph being sold into slavery by his half-brothers. Perhaps this isn't the greatest family to focus on today either! Moving on, we can think about King David's family. His almost reads like a soap opera with all of the jealousy,

hatred, and violence. David may have been the man after God's heart, but it is hard to find a more dysfunctional family than his.

Turning to the New Testament, we can think of King Herod and his family. Herod seduced and then married his brother's wife. He also allowed his stepdaughter to dance for the royal court which was very inappropriate. As a reward she was promised whatever she wanted and, urged by her mother, she demanded the head of John the Baptist on a platter. This most certainly is not the kind of reward that most caring mothers would advise their daughters to ask for! Turning once again to Jesus' family, they didn't believe in him. To be sure his brother James eventually became a pillar in the early church but that was only after Jesus' death and resurrection. After giving it some thought then, I decided that I really didn't want to preach about great families of the Bible either. Then I had another idea. I would preach about what a Christian family is supposed to be like.

In some of his letters St. Paul includes what scholars call the "Household Codes". These codes describe what Paul thought a Christian family should be like, and in the words of one of them:

"Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and so not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children or they will become discouraged".

I mentioned this idea to Susan and asked her what she thought. I quickly found out! "You've got to be kidding; 'wives, submit to your husbands' and so on? Do you really think that it is a good idea to preach that on Mother's Day?" I quickly agreed that that wasn't such a great idea either. And yet ...

There can be no doubt that the Household Codes, reflecting as they do a male dominated culture, do offend many of our modern sensibilities but there is more to them than meets the eye. This is to say, yes Paul told the wives to submit to their husbands but he also told the husbands that they were to love their wives just as Christ loves the church. And Christ of course loved the church so much that he died for its sake. The key to the marriage relationship then was mutual respect and love. The same went for the parent-child relationship as well.

Paul said that children were to obey their parents but at the same time, the parents weren't to be petty tyrants either. Instead, they were to be patient and understanding. Once again, the key to the relationship was to be mutual respect and love. Looking at the Household Codes we think of how old-fashioned they seem to be, but behind their old-fashioned and sexist appearance the codes are really very modern. Love one another, respect one another, and use Christ and his love as your inspiration and example.

Earlier in this message I made mention of some women from the Bible who were something less than perfect mothers. I also made mention of some parents whose child rearing skills left a lot to be desired. I did this tongue in cheek, but I was also making a serious point. There never has been and there never will be a perfect mother or family. Even so, on this Mother's Day and Christian Family Sunday, we still dare affirm the ideal and that ideal quite simply is this, that we will try to love and care just as God does. God loves us, not for what we do, but sometimes despite what we do. God loves us for who and what we are. With this in mind, I would like to share two stories with you. The first is obviously fictional while the second is true.

A woman died and arrived at the Gates of Heaven. While she was waiting for Saint Peter to greet her, she peeked through the Gates. "This is such a beautiful place" she said. "How do I get in?"

"You have to spell a word", Saint Peter told her.

"Which word?" the woman asked.

"Love".

The woman correctly spelled it and Saint Peter welcomed her into Heaven.

A year later, Saint Peter asked the woman to watch the Gates of Heaven for him that day. While the woman was doing this her husband arrived.

"I'm surprised to see you", the woman said. "How have you been?"

"Oh, I've been doing pretty well since you died", her husband told her. "I married a beautiful young woman and then I won the lottery. I sold the little house you and I lived in and bought a big mansion. After that my new wife and I

traveled all around the world. We were on vacation, and I went water skiing, fell, hit my head, and now here I am". Then he asked her, "How do I get into heaven anyway?"

"Well, you have to spell a word", the woman told him.

"Which word?" her husband asked.

" Kyrgyzstan" came the reply.

Contrast this to this true story.

It was a busy morning when an elderly gentlemen came to have stitches removed from his thumb. He stated that he was in a hurry as he had an appointment at 9:00.

I had him take a seat. I saw him looking at his watch, and decided that as I was not busy, I would evaluate his wound. It was well healed, so I talked to one of the doctors and got the needed supplies to remove his stitches.

While taking care of his wound, I asked him if he had a doctor's appointment as he was in such a hurry. The gentleman told me no, that he needed to go to the nursing home to eat breakfast with his wife. I then inquired as to her health. He told me that she had been there for a while and that she was a victim of Alzheimer's Disease.

I asked if she would be worried if he was a bit late. He replied that she no longer knew who he was, that she had not recognized him for five years. I was surprised and asked him. "And you still go every morning, even though she doesn't know who you are?" He smiled as he patted my hand and said "she doesn't know me, but I still know who she is."

The man loved his wife simply because of who she was, and so it is with God and us. And it is the same with us too. It doesn't matter whether we be talking about our mothers, our fathers, our spouses, other family members or anyone else for that matter; love is remembering and caring about the other person, despite their imperfections. That is how God loves us and that is how

we are to love others. And it is this, our choice to love, that we celebrate and affirm this special day.

### **Pastoral Prayer**

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

We give you thanks for what it is that we remember, celebrate, and affirm this day. Whether they be with us or with you, we remember our mothers and give thanks for all in them that is good, kind, and faithful, for all that they have meant, mean, and always will mean to us.

We give you thanks this day for all the other members of our families and the other special people in our lives as well. On this May morning, we thank you for life's many blessings but as we do so, we pray for those for whom this is not such a good day.

We pray for all the people who are haunted by the actions of others in the past, and by their own mistakes. As we celebrate the ties that bind this day, we pray for all of the relationships where those ties have, for whatever reason, been frayed. We pray for relationships in crisis, where trust has been replaced by distrust, love and affection by dislike or worse.

We pray this day for everyone who, for whatever reason, feels alienated from their family. Help us to remember that none of us are perfect. Help us, as best we can, to forgive others when they have failed us or let us down. Help us, as best we can, to love even as you love us.

We pray for the sake of healing, understanding, and reconciliation, for there is so much pain and heartache in the world around us.

We pray for the sake of peace, within us and between us. We pray for the sake of peace between the nations, even as the war continues in Ukraine. May the fighting come to an end, the suffering alleviated, and justice be done.

On this Christian Family Sunday, we give you thanks for this church family of which we are a part. We pray for your blessing upon her and her ministry to the world, both near and far.

We ask these things in your Son's name. Amen