

May 10, 2015

MOTHERS DAY FROM A FATHER'S PERSPECTIVE

by Rick Carlberg

1 John 5:1-6, John 15:9-17

First, I wish every Mother a very happy Mothers Day. It is a day to be celebrated, hopefully pampered with appreciation. Please enjoy this day with your family, whether it be with flowers, chocolates, a nice meal or perhaps a phone call from a distant child. Remember Fathers Day is coming up next month and it will be “pay back” time.

[putting on the afghan] I will explain what this is all about during the next few minutes, so please bear with me.

I find it curious in American culture we have Mothers Day and Fathers Day, but not Parents Day. Now, I realize not everyone has both parents in their lives. Life is not always kind. There is separation, divorce and death. Some people remain partially involved in their children’s upbringing, even though they may be physically present in the household.

I was fortunate to be raised by Mom and Dad. My brother and I celebrated both days as we could. As I remember it was flowers for Mom and golf balls or hand tools for Dad. My Dad would take the family out to lunch or dinner for Mothers Day. I do not recall ever seeing my father do dishes, so taking everyone out to dinner meant my mother did not have to do dishes on Mothers Day.

Maybe there is no Parents Day as you can never figure out who buys what for the other to celebrate. Doing one parent at a time eliminates that problem. Getting back to my example, on Mothers Day, Dad would slip us kids a few bucks for the flowers; On Fathers Day, Mom would do the same so we could buy the golf balls or hand tools.

Since I became a father over 30 years ago the tradition lives on. Unfortunately, my birthday is within a few days of Fathers Day, so I typically get 1 larger present, instead of 2 smaller ones. Oh well, life goes on.

As you can see from the message title, I want to share Mothers Day from a father’s perspective. Fair warning, however: some of this will not be pretty, as life is sometimes not pretty. I cannot begin to comprehend what Pastor Clarissa is thinking today, or for anyone who has lost a child. We pray for all parents who no longer have a child in their life.

The first trait I think of a mother is love, unabashed, not ever apologizing love. It does not matter what you have done, who you have associated with or how much money you make. Mom just loves her children. Now there are times when it may not sound like it, you all know what I mean, but she genuinely loves her children all of the time.

I read the tragic story of the family in Menasha, Wisconsin, shot by an angry man who had broken up with his fiancée. He killed the father, a daughter and another man on the bridge before taking his life. The wife and mother, Erin Stoffel, stood between the gunman and her other 2 children. That saved her

children, but at the cost of 3 bullets, one each in the abdomen, thigh and hand. The last I saw on the Internet, she was in fair condition following surgery.

Our reading from the Gospel of John shows no higher calling than giving your life for another. He gave his life, through his blood and suffering so we have eternal life. Erin, the mother, put herself between the killer and her children. I cannot think of a higher act of calling of this mother's love.

The gospel reading emphasizes love, primarily in a spiritual sense. We need to keep the father's commandments. Why? So we will be happy, so we will be joyful, so we will be complete. We are to love one another as Christ loves us. No strings are attached, no money needs exchanging, just love one another. In short, love God as Mom loves you.

Moms also take care of their Mothers and Fathers. Look no further than Marlene Curtis. She cared and loved Emma in her own home for years. They worked together on crafts, played games and kept each other company. Marlene did all she could for as long as should could to keep Emma happy and involved in life. It was at this time that Emma made over 100 afghans. Many of those were sold in raffles for new firefighting and rescue equipment for our community. We have no way of telling how those afghans helped saved lives in western Kenosha county, but I am sure there are some. I have one, and it is one of my most precious material possessions. It is draped here on this pulpit. By Marlene's actions she kept the honorary mother of this church going. It was all driven by a mother's love. Marlene had a good teacher in Emma... and so love is handed down from generation to generation, from mother to mother.

We need to keep Marlene in our prayers as she struggles with her final stages of earthly life. Make no mistake where she is going. Love conquers all, even the heart of God.

[pause]

Let's turn our attention to our reading from **1 John 5:1-6**. This is a beautiful scripture that draws the similarity of the family with our relationship to Christ. If we are Christian, then we are born of God. Parents love their children just like God loves his children. We show happiness in returning our love to God and keeping his commandments. This should not be difficult because we have defeated the world. We can claim victory through our faith. God will not let us go. He will not break his promises. We will be taken care of.

This scripture was written before there was a public safety net for the less fortunate. There was no government welfare system. Imperial Rome did not care if you were a widow without any visible means of support. Oh, Well. Too bad. Tough luck. It was the family that provided the safety net. The family looked after one another, a safety net spanning multiple generations. I suspect it is like the household of God. It is a household of love, a household of support, a household of guidance. No doubt Mom has a say in how it functions.

Sometimes being a Mom is showing "tough love", when the child has stepped out of the normal bounds of decorum. You draw the line on bad behavior. You show who is running the household. You set the expectation of good behavior. Why? It is compassion and love of the child. You love them so much, that you are not their friend. You do not want them hurt and so take the extraordinary action to protect the child from themselves. Love of a child is not easy. But, Moms, you do it well.

[pause]

Yesterday morning, Joanna and I went to a memorial service for a mother who attended our prior United Methodist Church in Carol Stream, Illinois. The mother, Lisa Verhasselt was the choir director at our church in Carol Stream when we left to come here almost 21 years ago. Lisa was born on Mothers Day,

1965. This is 50 years ago, but she unfortunately did not see this birthday, due to a brain cancer discovered in 2013. Music filled the sanctuary, and it reinforced everything Lisa stood for in music ministry. Before she passed away, Lisa had time to put down on paper things she was going to miss. Number 1 on the list: She was going to miss holding her grandchildren, none of whom have been born yet. I do not believe there was a dry eye in the audience of some 300 people when those words were read. Lisa held strong to her faith in Christ. Person after person came up to the microphone and told stories about what a wonderful mother she was, not just to her own children, but to her Sunday School class, her piano students and even adults in her weekday Bible study. They all indicated the source of her love was not just the rock solid marriage to her husband Kirk and her 2 daughters, but how Christ had worked in her life. The disease she faced was physically painful, but she let people know this was only temporary as she knew God will heal her. It is a powerful lesson of a mother of 2 children and the others she touched, as expressed by her faith.

[pause]

Back to this afghan. Now I know Emma was not my mother. Yet, she touched my heart and this afghan was a gift she gave me. It was a thank you gift for a small thing I did for her. I was so happy to receive it, and not just because I use it while taking a nap on our comfortable leather couch. She touched all of our hearts. It was love for her community that drove Emma to make over 100 of these works of art. So that is the theme of my message today. Moms, you are love. It does not have to be blood born children to make you a mother. Just show love, affection and that occasional disciplinary action to make you be the Mom that makes Christ proud of you, a vital part of God's community, right here in Kenosha County. Do it in the spirit of our scripture readings today and all will be well.

Someday we may have a Parents Day, when the kids get to give their parents something together. Until then, we have to remember our eternal father. Let's not forget him and all that he has done for us and all he continues to do for us, as illustrated by our mothers.

Amen

Benediction:

Go out into the world with a new appreciation of mothers. Bring her some flowers. Buy her some chocolates. Just give her a call on the phone. Most importantly, love one another as a mother loved you. May the grace, love and peace of Jesus Christ be with all of you, now and forever. Go in peace, knowing we have a new life in Christ to do his will on Earth. Amen.