

Chosen

Sunday 14th May 2017

Readings: Psalm 31:1-5,15-16, Acts 7:55-60, 1 Peter 2:2-10, John 14:1-14

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Today is Mother's Day. In preparation for this sermon I have been contemplating God's incredible breadth of creativity. After all, who would possibly have thought of creating man and woman, two vastly different beings sharing the same species as human beings. Let's face it – it took God to think of that one. It reflects, to a lesser extent, the relational nature of God in Trinity. God created us to be different as fundamental levels so that through that difference we might come to know something of who He is as we learn to relate to one another, to live and grow together.

In the early chapters of Genesis we see the creation and the fall of humanity into the grip of sin. When Adam and Eve were created they were helpmates for each other, equals in their status and position before God. When they sinned, the result of deception and choosing to do evil, to rebel against God's Word, they experienced the consequence of unredeemed sin. Unrepentant and ongoing sin will have consequences, immediate, mid, long term and eternal. For Adam this meant he and all mankind would have to work for their lives. For Eve it meant she became subservient to Adam, woman to man and would have pain in childbirth. Until Christ came then in Jesus the world was changed. Because of Jesus' sacrifice for us we receive the love, forgiveness and restoration of God as we accept Jesus as our Saviour and as we walk with Him. In Christ, as Galatians 3:28 spells out so clearly, there is no slave nor free, Jew nor Greek, male nor female. In Jesus we are all brought together as brothers and sisters, as a loving family. The boundary lines, the hierarchy imposed by the consequence of sin is torn asunder, as was the Temple curtain, because Jesus has paid for our sin and we are no longer under its penalty. In the Christian community men and women walk as equals. In much of the world, evil still imposes male over female but not for us. It becomes easy to tell who is walking in faith, who knows Christ's redemption, and who isn't, by their actions and attitudes. The Christian family is one of equality, faithfulness, transparent integrity and unity, even though males and females are different in their functions.

When we look about us in society we see no end of confusing directions and temptations. So many standards which are far below that Jesus has demonstrated for life. Yet the life of faith is simple and clear. Where does it begin? It begins in the home. I often think to myself, if God is going to judge my life, then how I am in the home is likely to be the most telling indicator of my honesty, my transparency, my love and care. If I'm not living it at home, then the rest of my life will be a lie because home is truly where the heart reveals itself. And training our hearts and minds from the earliest age is critical.

Which brings us to Mother's Day. Educators and medical experts tell us, in so many fields, that what happens in a child's first years of life have a critical impact on their whole life. A child talked to frequently and engaged speaks, socialises and learns faster and better. Children fed good food will likely avoid developing poor food habits and the propensity to put on unwanted weight. It's equally true in spiritual things. God calls us to be his people. He has chosen us to be His family and it is up to us to respond to that call. Mothers play a critically important role in shaping a child's life and developing the spiritual life of children is vitally important. Some mothers are biological others are true mothers by their actions. The best lessons are those observed over a long period of time. Again the integrity in the home pays off. I've loved watching my wife Lorraine with our girls. I'm sure that one of the foundations of their faith has been the numerous conversations and prayers Lorraine had

with them from the earliest days, at home, at bedtime, on the way to school, just a natural part and reflection of who she is. 1 Peter tells us that we are precious stones being built up into God's house. It's a powerful image. Each one of us is unique and special in God's sight. We are not all the same like standardised bricks but unique and different, yet the right place is there for each one of us to fill. Each of us are shaped by those about us and especially by loving parents. We are built up by those around us and, as we get older, by what and who we chose to associate with. When the cornerstone of our lives is increasingly transferred to and then resides on Jesus, in His community, we can be sure of the future.

The image of the home is a key one in Scripture. Even in John 14, that passage used so often at funerals, Jesus promised His disciples that he was going to prepare a place for His disciples. A home in heaven. The family unit, and we must use this in a wide sense, not just the more recent nuclear family of mum, dad and children but the wider sense of extended family is a vital part of God's plan for us. We are made to be both in community and part of an extended spiritual family. We begin to understand and learn about this from the youngest age with our mothers and will never stop learning about it into eternity. God even states that He will place the lonely in families. Why? Because we belong together.

Which brings us back to mum's. The challenges in society and economic pressures are such today that the traditional model of the stay-at-home mum looking after the children is actually now quite rare. For starters 50% of children, sadly, are now being brought up in single parent homes. That's an indictment on our society. Economic pressures in places like we live in mean that frequently both parents have to work to be able to sustain a mortgage and a physical home. This is sad and challenging. What, as Christians, can we do or say about this? Four things:

Firstly, we recognise that God has created the concept of family for similar reasons as to why God created male and female. He is building us together. The family both educates us, not just mentally and physically, but more critically in how to love and be loved. The home should be the source of love for children as they learn it from how parents demonstrate love to one another. This isn't something faked but something that you grow with and into deeper and deeper the longer you are married. It takes work and effort but I can promise you it's worth it. What it takes is humility and not putting yourself first. In society we can fake it a lot but not in the home. Not with the one we are married to. God calls us to honour our marriage vows and make our family the place of our greatest witness.

Secondly, because education begins at birth God speaks through the educators of children. Generally, through the mums and dads first of all. Then through extended family. And then through siblings. Then through the wider community. The messages of love and faith passed on become, in so many ways, a blueprint for life. The social and medical sciences, dealing with problems in later life so often come back to what happened in childhood. Why? Because it is so fundamental to our whole life. It's why it makes me so sad when marriages break up – the children are always impacted and so often it is the mum's left to fend and deal with everything. Good education is triggered, so often, at the mothers' knee. Education in the world and in things spiritual. When we recognised this and support mums we support God's work in the world.

Thirdly, as Christians, we can continue to emphasise the importance of the home and having mothers (or sometimes dads) able to be at home with their children to raise then and educate them, especially in the earliest years. Politicians make policy based on public opinion and the Christian voice needs to be heard loud and clear that the home is critical to society and

parents ability to properly support their children through their formative years should be a sign of any civilised society.

Fourthly, as Christians we need to make decisions about what we see as important and balance the demands of society against this. Making decisions for your children, to be able to mother and father properly requires sacrificial effort. You may not be able to earn as much or live in the style to which you want to be accustomed. But nothing replaces time with children. How often have people said – I wish I'd made more time. It's too easy to blame everything else. Lorraine and I chose to have Lorraine at home while each of our children were growing up in their first five years. It certainly cost us financially but it is one thing I will never regret. Some things are far more important than ones income.

The reality is that to be a mum today is not easy. Parenting is often shared to achieve the goals society imposes and this is not a bad thing at all so long as it works. Mum's need all the support and prayer they can get to do the wonderful job so many do. And mem need to step up to the mark and do what they should do as well in love, support and faithfulness. If the world were to see Christian families stepping up in such a way it would have a tremendous impact because the home is so fundamental to life.

God is building us into His house, shaping us a royal household worthy of Him, mums are vital in this work as they are vital to their children. So today let's appreciate and support our mums and thank God for them and pray for them.

Amen