

A Mother's Wisdom

St. John's Presbyterian, Mt. Roskill

Sunday 13th May – Mother's Day 2018

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Readings: Luke 1:46-55, 1 Kings 3:16-28, Exodus 2:1-10, Luke 2:41-52

There is no doubt that for many of us the birth of a child, particularly our first-born, is a life changing experience. How many people's driving improved that day? How many people's appreciation of regular sleep took on a whole new meaning? But even more, how much does one's love deepen and grow for a new child and for your family? Having a wife and four daughters it has been fascinating watching the seasons of life as it were. Now, particularly as our daughters are becoming wonderful mothers themselves, it's interesting to see how Lorraine's role is not the same but different. This is not new, it's a process of life that has been going on for hundreds of generations. In our society it should be that motherhood can be a joy, even with its ups and downs and learning curves. What fascinates me is how much my girls have not only learnt, but consciously learnt, from their mother and from the things they have done or seen together. Sometimes lessons are relearnt by making the same mistakes and quickly recognising what is happening and at other times mistakes are not made because lessons have been learnt well. I'd have to say that I'm also massively impressed by this generation of young men that take their role as fathers and husbands seriously and are highly involved.

This morning, being Mother's Day, we are going to take a look at a few women in the Scriptures and how their wisdom continues to be helpful for us today.

Our call to worship this morning began with Mary's Song from Luke's gospel. It's only a few short verses but full of delight and emotion. Mary has recognised and rejoices in the fact that God has chosen her to bear a son of special significance. It doesn't matter what her social status or situation in life God is giving her a very special gift. When we consider her response it's quite inspiring. Every child is a gift from God and uniquely special regardless of the situation of their birth. Mary is pregnant, she's not married, she's spoken with an angel who has given her a message that no one is going to believe. She's in an impossible situation, yet she knows God is doing something special in her life and she will hold on to that and rejoice in it and look to the future beyond all the challenges she must know will lie before her. She rejoices, she celebrates, she praises God and exults. This is the true Biblical fear of God – the awe, the amazingness, the celebration of the impossible that only God can do, and the absolute trust that God will bring it about what He intends to achieve, and, because of who God is, we will be ok. This is rejoicing in the majestic, incredible, awesome God who loves us and knows us and cares for us no matter how humble our estate.

Our second narrative concerning Mary came in our third reading today. In this text over a decade has passed and now we begin to see the first fruits of what had been promised. The young baby that Mary bore has now become a young man full of wisdom seemingly beyond His years. In the narrative, Jesus is in the Temple at Jerusalem having what would be a very normal session with the teachers in the Temple courts. During the various Jewish festivals each year there would be opportunities for the young men who had come in from near and far to sit with the

teachers and learn the things of faith. The normal Jewish teaching pattern is one of reflective questions. The teacher might introduce a topic or text and then either wait for questions or ask questions to start the dialogue. When a question was asked it would be responded to, not with an answer necessarily, but more readily with a question forcing the student to dig deeper. Only when the student had reached the end of their capacity would enlightenment be given. We see a shadow of this in Jesus rhetorical question to Nicodemus in John 3. Nicodemus starts by asking Jesus a question to which Jesus gives a somewhat cryptic reply forcing Nicodemus to question again and so the dialogue goes. Mary has a son that is already, by the age of twelve, excelling and has become confident and independent beyond His years. This freedom of spirit is also a challenge to her as a mother. Her son doesn't always do things the way she would want. I wonder how many mothers have experienced children who have minds of their own! In this narrative Jesus has gone and spent far more time at the Temple than would be expected. When they leave Jesus does not travel with the caravan but for a day that's not noticed. This tells us something of the freedom and responsibility that Mary and Joseph have given Jesus as a young man and the responsibility He has already assumed in life. Only this time it goes wrong. A child not living up to expectations ... hmm ... wonder when that's ever happened? Jesus has failed to be as considerate of His parents as they would have expected. They have not fully realized the overwhelming focus of Jesus' life. Parents are constantly navigating new ground with children and young adults and while it's important, even critical, to give young people freedom and let them learn to take responsibility for their own lives, it is also a very difficult time for parents. Mary and Joseph both rebuke Jesus and express their love and concern for Him like any good parents would. Luke tells us that Mary "treasured these things in her heart". The word for "treasured" here is a Greek term that refers to keeping something close, reflectively in her heart. In other words, Mary, observed and reflected on what Jesus was doing and how God was working out His plan in His life. She knew that not only would He bring great joy but also there would be times of intense pain. Loving parents have to learn to not only care for their children deeply but also to let them go in life to fulfil their own destiny. Mary carried these ups and downs deeply in her heart and reflected on them and no doubt carried them as deep concerns for prayer, as loving mothers do.

At the other end of the spectrum our reading from 1 Kings reminds us that some women have very difficult, dark and troubled lives. The two prostitutes who came before Solomon were both women for whom life was unpleasant and for whom the reality of a son was a potential door to a better life. Living vicariously through one's children, placing the weight of one's own needy expectations on your offspring, can be a dangerous path. Both these women saw a son as path to escape their situation. Cot-death is an awful and painful thing that still occurs too frequently. It is hard to imagine the pain of a small child lost this way, even more so when a child is seen as an escape from a life of wretchedness. The woman's initial response in the case brought to Solomon's is at least understandable. There is a special, natural love of parents for their own and this is what Solomon recognises. A true mother will sacrifice and sacrifice, again and again, for her children. We see this in loving mothers time and again, in small things and in large. In this case the true mother

will give up her own rights simply to ensure her child lives while the false mother only has self-interest at heart and doesn't actually care what happens to the child if she cannot get her own way. How sad is this? Solomon sees the love of true mother and responds appropriately. Love, sacrifice and perseverance – all characteristics that are recognised and we want to celebrate in our mother's today.

Our third situation comes from the Exodus account and the narrative of Moses' birth. It brings with it a salutary lesson. When Moses was born the Egyptians had forgotten the time of prosperity and good governance that they had experienced under the Hebrew Joseph. Time and generations have moved on and the Egyptians had become fearful of the increasingly large Jewish population. Pharaoh had commanded the midwives to kill all Hebrew males at birth. Moses' mother, Jochebed, didn't want to lose her child so, famously after hiding him for three months, placed him in a papyrus reed basket and set him afloat on the Nile. This is not only a sign of desperation but also a great depth of trust in God for her child's provision. How much prayer followed that young baby? Moses, as we know, was then found by Pharaoh's daughter, brought into her house and brought up as her own son. In an ironic twist, Moses' own mother Zochebed was called on to be the child's nanny. Prayer was answered in a way that could not have been expected. This too is a great lesson for mothers. There comes a time, not usually so early one would hope, when all that can be done is to place our faith in God for our child's or children's destiny. All the love and care that is invested in children gives them a wonderful start in life, but they have to face the world and make their own way. Hopefully not quite as young as Moses! The greater and deeper nurturing children get, the more they learn from their parents, hopefully, the better head start they have in life. Will they see faith and learn it from their parents or not? Yes or no, there comes a time, sooner or later, when faith has to be their own and they have to grow their own faith. The parents apron-strings in life and in faith have to cut so the child is free to become who they are meant to be and to develop their own strong personalities and faith. This is not always and easy time for mums.

Good mothers, and dad's for that matter, are there for their children. Nothing replaces time. There is a wonderful thing when children are not abandoned by parents, literally or effectively, but mums and dads are there for them, physically spending time with them and doing things with them. This is when true love and faith and demonstrated and imparted. In all the challenges of life, regardless of situation, God has created families for a purpose, to be the strong base for society. Love and faith, learnt at a mother's knee, still remain one of the strongest and greatest tenants of any society and we celebrate this today. So, to all you mums, be it by birthing or nurturing, thank you! You have a vitally important role to play in God's Kingdom and I know that Jesus knows just how important you are. After all – He looked up to His mum too! Have a wonderful Mother's Day and may the Lord bless each one of you.

Amen