

YOU RAISE ME UP

1 Samuel 1: 21-28

A Man Like Mom!

I have read a Facebook post. A son and his dad have a conversation. The kid asks his dad, “Dad! What is a man?” The dad proudly says, “A man is someone who is responsible and cares for his family.” The kid says, “Oh! Is it so? Then, I hope one day I can be a man just like mom!”

Happy Mother’s Day! Thanks to all you mothers who have made your sons want to be men like mom! A philosopher, Samuel Taylor Coleridge said, “The love of a mother is the veil of a softer light between the heart and the heavenly Father.” We can see and experience the love of God through our mothers. Some say, “a child is carried in its’ mother’s womb for nine months but a child is carried in its mother’s heart forever.” Thanks to all mothers who carry their children in their hearts forever.

At the same time, I know that Mother's Day can be a very painful day for some of you for lots of different reasons. Maybe your mother is no longer alive, and you really miss her. Or maybe you'd love to be a mother, and that just hasn't happened. Or maybe you don't have a very good relationship with your mother. If Mother’s Day is a difficult day for you, please remember that God is not only our heavenly Father but also our heavenly mother who gives life to all creation. So let us celebrate Mother’s Day together and gives thanks to all mothers and our God.

The Divine Task of Raising Children

Mother’s Day is not exactly a religious celebration. But the beginning of the modern Mother’s Day celebration started with the Methodist church. Did you know that? The modern holiday of Mother's Day was first celebrated in 1908, when Anna Jarvis held a memorial for her mother at St Andrew's Methodist Church in Grafton, West Virginia. Now, Mother’s Day has become a day of national celebration.

I think Mother’s Day is a good example of how Methodists work for the transformation of the world. A good mother raised good children in faith and she changed the world by raising her children in faith. Of course, raising children is not the responsibility of mothers only so don’t get me wrong. Raising children is a holy responsibility of parents. Andy Stanly, the senior pastor of North Point Community Church, said, “your greatest contribution may not be something you do but someone you raise.” Many of you have already done an excellent job in raising your children. Some of you are still raising your children. God bless you and your divine task of raising your children.

Hannah and Samuel

While we often do not recognize it, in the Bible, many faithful women changed the world. In Exodus, Pharaoh ordered “Every boy that is born to the Hebrews to be killed.” But Moses’ mother was brave enough not to follow Pharaoh’s order and raised her Son Moses. Pharaoh’s daughter knew Moses was one of the Hebrew children but she was compassionate enough to adopt him as her own son. Miriam, Moses’ sister, was courageous enough to step out before Pharaoh’s daughter to help Moses to be raised by his own mother. Without these three women, Moses, the greatest leader of Israel, might not have been alive at all. These three women changed the world by loving and nurturing a child.

Hannah is also a great example of how one can change the world by raising a child. As we know, Hannah was childless. Although her husband dearly loved her, he didn’t understand

Hannah's unhappiness and pain. Instead of passively accepting her situation, Hannah brought her struggle and pain before the Lord. She prayed to Yahweh, the God of Israel and made a vow:

Oh, God-of-the-Angel-Armies,
If you'll take a good, hard look at my pain,
If you'll quit neglecting me and go into action for me
By giving me a son,
I'll give him completely, unreservedly to you.
I'll set him apart for a life of holy discipline.

Hannah is the only woman in the Hebrew Bible who explicitly made a pledge to God. God responded to her prayer and gave her Samuel. Hannah raised him in faith and dedicated him to serve the Lord at the temple. And Samuel became a great leader who delivered Israel from the threat and oppression of the surrounding countries. Without Hannah's prayer, Samuel would not have been born at all. Raising children in faith is a holy responsibility.

Charles Wesley, a brother of John Wesley, said "I learned more about God from my mother than from all the theologians in England." I can relate with Charles Wesley's words. As you know, my father was a pastor but it was mostly my mother who taught me about God when I was young. I still remember a big bible story book. When my brother and I went to bed, my mother always read a chapter of that bible story book. I liked the story of Exodus and Samson. After reading the bible story, she placed her hands on my forehead and prayed for me. And I still remember the warmth of her hand and the feeling of something divine in that moment.

If you are still raising your children, tell them about God everyday at home. Talk with them about God, the Bible, and life. Listen to their struggles and doubts about faith. Affirm their experience of God. Pray for them at their bedsides and encourage them to be good Christians by being a good example. They may not remember a boring sermon about God from the pastor, but they surely learn about God from your words and caring acts of love for them. Be a good mother of faith to your children. That is your sacred responsibility and at the same time an amazing blessing from God. Amen?

Mother Church

Many of you have finished your task of raising children, but we as a church still have the important task of raising God's children. The celebration of Mother's Day was originally the celebration of Mother Church rather than that of motherhood. Because the church functions to form and nourish believers, the church is a mother of all believers. We, as the body of Christ still have a responsibility to feed and nurture other believers and non-believers to grow in faith. If you are able to raise our youth in faith, if you help other members to rise from their despair... if you invite someone into faith and help them to grow in faith... if you nurture your pastor to grow, you are doing the work of mother.

It's been 16 years that I have been in the ministry. Before I came to Asbury UMC, I have served several churches. I can tell you that I have been nurtured and grown as a pastor by faithful people of God I have met during my ministry in those churches. My home church was a spiritual womb that gave birth to my faith. My first parish was like a mother who taught her child how to ride a bike. I made a lot of mistakes and often fell into the group but God's faithful people raised me up again and again. My second parish was the place I learned how to lead a bible study and developed leadership skills. We normally assume and expect pastors to know how to lead Bible

studies. Right? But, a pastor also needs to learn how from others. I learned from a lay leader of that church. In my previous church, I was able to develop intercultural competency. It was the first cross-cultural appointment for that church and for me. But they embraced me and Juhee as their church family and nurtured me with their love so that I grew to be better pastor. If you enjoy me as your pastor, you owe it to all those faithful people of God in those churches. I expect the same thing of Asbury UMC. I hope that Asbury UMC continues to be a mother church of many other Christians and pastors as well.

Mother's Day as the day of Remembrance of God's Maternal love

Mother's Day is not only a day of celebration of motherhood and of mother church, but it also is a day of remembering and celebrating God's maternal love. Which expression is more familiar to you "Heavenly Father" or "Heavenly mother?" Heavenly Father, of course. The church's patriarchal and androcentric understanding and expression of God has been normal for many centuries. However, God is not male nor female. God includes and at the same time, transcends both categories of description. Since we have been so familiar with heavenly father and his paternal love, I believe that Mother's Day should be an intentional day of remembering and celebrating God's maternal love. In the Bible, God's love is described in terms of a mother's love for her children. Through the prophet Isaiah, God said, "Can a mother forget the infant at her breast, walk away from the baby she bore? But even if mothers forget, I'd never forget you—never." (Isaiah 49:15) In Isaiah 66:13, God said, "As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem." The cross of Jesus Christ is a vivid manifestation of the maternal love of God. Like a mother who sacrifices herself for her children, God gave herself up for us. In this mysterious divine love, we find new life.

So let us celebrate God's maternal love that embraces, nurtures, forgives and encourages us today. With this love, let us love one another and people will know we are Christian by our love. Amen.