

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
Message for Mother's Day, Sunday, May 8, 2016
"That They May All Be One"

Text: John 17:20-26

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.²²The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. ²⁴Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Happy Mother's Day!

By show of hands how many of you have mothers?

That's great, looks like almost everyone. I find the most powerful messages are those that connect with a common experience.

In the text for today, a section of what is commonly known as Jesus' High Priestly prayer, Jesus is seeking a common experience for all of us. He is praying that we might have unity and community together with the father and him.

I can think of no better text upon which to reflect on Mother's Day than this one. Jesus' prayer is so full of love and wonderful intention for us. An intention perfectly accomplished through his life, death and resurrection. For me there has been no person in the world who has mirrored the intention of Jesus for my life better than my mother.

The Bible is packed with imagery and stories of family. God as loving father, respect for parents, care for children, the selection of Mary to be mother to God's

only son. God invented families and his intention is that each and every one of us experience the love of family.

Then the deception of Satan breaks in shattering God's intention for relationship with him and with one another. The elemental fracturing that happened as recorded in Genesis chapter three separates us from God and from each other. We are caught in sin. Sin, most exquisitely defined in the Latin phrase, *incurvatus in se*. Which translated means turned in on self. Those who are turned in on self cannot fully engage in relationships. And families are broken.

Fathers and mothers divorce. God's intention that we see his love mirrored in our parents' marriage is lost.

Mothers die. God's intention that we know her nurturing touch is unfulfilled leaving a void that lasts a lifetime.

Parents are abusive emotionally and/or physically. God's intention that we be raised in a place of security and unconditional love is shattered.

In the wake of the fall and as a backstop to this loss God forms another community, a backup, if you will. The faith community, that we know today as the Church. Given the calling most simply and eloquently captured by James in chapter one verse twenty-seven of his letter.

True religion is this, that you care for widows and orphans.

So even in the absence of a mother God has a plan. The plan is you. All of us here today, the church, we are God's plan when family falls apart. We are God's good intention for community that cares for the lost, the least, and the left behind.

Last year on April 25th a devastating earthquake struck the heart of Nepal. Just before the quake hit little Sujata, not yet two years old, went with her mother into the bathroom. As the quake began Sujata's mother pushed the little girl out of the bathroom and harm's way. Mom, however, didn't make it out in time as the building came down suddenly crushing her under a pile of rubble. Her last act as Sujata's mother was to save her daughter's life.

With his wife dead and his country in shambles Sujata's father was forced to leave the country to find work in India. Unable to care for her he brought Sujata to the ServLife orphanage in Kathmandu. Last July I was there in Nepal for the occasion of Sujata's second birthday and her first day with her new family. The community of Christians raised up by God to care for orphaned children. This, my friends, is the church at its very best. A mother to the motherless.

God has an intention for you. His intention for me was expressed by my mother. She loved Jesus and she shared that love with me in words and actions. In the

High Priestly prayer of Jesus I hear echoes of my Mother's words. When the outside world came down on me in the form of grade school bullies I heard, "The world doesn't know you, but I know you and you are loved."

When the challenges and stresses of growing up overwhelmed me Mom exhibited the unconditional love of God. She let me know God loved me even as he loved his own son, Jesus. Yes, I was blessed with a mother who knew Jesus and diligently shared his love with me.

Even more, she brought me into the community of believers. From my baptism at Pilgrim Lutheran Church in Louisville, Kentucky to my days in the grade school classrooms of St. John's Lutheran Church in Portage, Wisconsin my mother demonstrated the love of God to me in countless ways and taught me by example that we who follow Christ are the community that fills the void when mother's and father's are lost.

The year before her death in 1992 my mom had the opportunity to go to Thailand. Her husband was returning from a work assignment in Saudi Arabia and she met him on his return trip in Bangkok, a city teeming with orphaned and abandoned children begging on the streets. Mom's heart was broken for these children. Everywhere they went she would interact with them. She would smile and kneel down to meet them eye to eye. Sharing a hug and a smile transcended the language barrier. Having never traveled outside the country this was her first experience in a third world country where such pain and loss as these children experienced was inescapable.

Her husband, who had traveled extensively overseas finally let his frustration get the best of him and said, "Judy, you can't help all these children." Turning her gaze from the child in front of her she told him, "No, but I can help this one."

That is the heart of a mother. That is the heart of God. That is our calling as Church...to help this one.

Maybe my mom experience was yours, too. Maybe your mother understood God's intention for her and for you through her. If thirty-five years of ministry has taught me anything, however, it's that many have not experienced the unconditional love of Jesus through their parents. For many it's been quite the opposite. So warm, loving reflections of mom on this day aren't resonating for you. This day, in fact, might even be painful.

This morning I want you to know that is not God's intention for you. No, God's intention is so wonderfully articulated by Jesus.

I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

It breaks my heart to know the corruption of sin has broken in and so grievously damaged God's good intention for us...for you. It is his desire that you know you are loved. Hear that...not that you be loved but to know that you *are* loved. If you have been denied that love within the context of family I pray you are finding that love here. At Pilgrim. In this community. The love of Jesus overflowing, without reservation or condition. Granted because of who God is and not because of any merit or meeting of expectations.

I pray the love with which God loved Jesus may be in you and might flow out of you to a world desperate to know that kind of love.

To all the mothers here today I celebrate you and the role to which God has called you. What an awesome calling to be the embodiment of love, nurture, and caring to the children with which you've been blessed.

And I celebrate you, the church, who have been called by God to stand in the stead of mothers who have been taken from their children. What a privilege to provide the love of God to those whose families have been fractured.

Unity, community, unconditional love, to be known in ways the world cannot know, to engage in relationships and be part of something bigger than ourselves. This is God's intention for us. An intention restored by Jesus Christ and available to all who will receive him.

It is my prayer today that you have received him and that on Mother's Day and everyday you are living into the intention God has for you.

Amen.