

“A Salute to Mothers”

Date: May 10, 2015

Place: Lakewood UMC

Occasion: Mother's Day

Theme: Mothers' Day

Texts: 2 timothy 1:3-7; romans 16:1-16

I have a confession to make. There are some parts of the Bible I prefer to just skim right over and not really pay any attention to.

Romans 16 is just such a chapter. For the longest time I thought this chapter was boring. It was nothing more than a long list of names, most of who were hard to pronounce. And so, I would jump over that section to get to what I thought was more important stuff.

Over the years, I have changed my attitude, somewhat, at least in regards to *this* particular chapter. You see, I've discovered there is a lot more here than what I first imagined. For example, it's interesting to note that of the 26 people who Paul singles out for a personal greeting, six of them are women.

Why do I think that's so interesting? Well, for me, it's because Paul has frequently been accused of being a male chauvinist and anti-women. The mention of these six women shows that he's not.

I also think it's interesting because it shows us the tremendous influence women had in the early church. In the male dominated, first century Palestine, it's pretty amazing that Paul *couldn't* describe the church without mentioning the significant role of women.

Verse 13 of chapter 16 is particularly note-worthy. Paul writes, "Give my greetings to Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine." Now, this statement could be taken two different ways. It could mean that Paul had two distinct women in mind, the mother of Rufus and his own personal mother.

Or, he could be saying, “I salute Rufus and his mother, who is like a mother to me.” If that is what he meant, and most biblical scholars agree *that is* what he probably meant, then it raises some interesting speculation.

When and where did Paul meet the mother of Rufus? Did she nurse him through some serious illness? Did she receive him into her home during one of his long missionary journeys? How did this woman and Paul form such a close bond that he refers to her fondly as being like his mother?

Let’s do a little more detective work, to see if we can find out who this woman was. Mark, in his gospel, tells us that the man who carried Jesus’ cross on the day of his crucifixion, a man by the name of Simon of Cyrene, had two sons: Alexander and Rufus.

Was this the same Rufus to whom Paul was speaking, here in his letter to the Romans? If so, then “his mother” to whom he sends this greeting, would have been the wife of Simon of Cyrene. Interesting stuff, isn’t it? No one knows for sure who this remarkable woman was, who served as a mother-figure to the apostle Paul.

But for our purposes, it really doesn’t make that much difference. We simply see that this note-worthy woman affected Paul in such a way, that he lovingly referred to her as “mother.” And so, today, we want to salute all of our mothers, living and deceased.

There are a lot of ministers who shun this day, because, they say, it isn’t really a Christian holiday. Perhaps so, perhaps it is a sentimental thing that we do, but what’s wrong with that? For Methodists, this day holds a special importance in our heart, because the woman who got this day recognized as a national holiday was a

Methodist. Anna Jarvis, of Grafton, West Virginia, was able to persuade the president of the US to declare Mothers' Day a national holiday in 1914.

Even though every mother is not perfect, and even though some mothers are down-right abusive to their children, I believe it is still the right thing to do to honor and recognize moms. So, this morning, I would like to join the apostle Paul and salute our mothers.

For my salute, I'd like to read you a story that I received by email. It's written by a mother who believed that she was invisible, until her friend gave her a book, with a hand-written note on the inside cover. It changed her life. Here's the story of the invisible mom.

"It all began to make sense: the blank stares, the lack of response, and the way the kids would walk into the room while I was still on the phone and ask me to take them to the store. I thought, "Can't you see I'm on the phone?" Obviously not.

No one can see if I'm on the phone, or cooking, or sweeping the floor, or even standing on my head in a corner, because no one can see me at all. I'm invisible. I'm the invisible mom. Some days, I'm only a pair of hands, nothing more. "Can you fix this?" "Can you tie this?" "Can you open this?"

I was certain that these hands that once held books, these eyes that had studied history, and this mind that graduated *summa cum laude*, they had all disappeared into peanut butter, never to be seen again. She's going, she's going, she's gone!

One night, a group of us were having dinner, celebrating the return of a friend coming back from England. Janice had just gotten back from her trip and she was going on and on about the hotel she

had stayed in. I was sitting there, looking at the others, all put together so well. It was hard for me not to compare and feel sorry for myself.

I was feeling pretty pathetic when Janice turned to me with a beautifully wrapped package. She said, "I bought this for you." It was a book on the great cathedrals of Europe. I wasn't exactly sure why she had given it to me, until I read her inscription on the inside cover.

"To my dear friend, with admiration for the greatness you are building when no one sees."

In the days ahead, I would read, no, devour that book. I discovered what would become for me four life-changing truths: 1- No one can say who built the great cathedrals; we have no records of their names. 2 - These builders gave their whole lives for a work they would never see finished. 3 - They made sacrifices and expected no credit. 4 - The passion of their building was fueled by their faith that the eyes of God saw everything.

A legend was told in the book, of a rich man who came to visit a cathedral while it was being built. When he saw a workman carving a tiny bird on the inside of a beam, he became puzzled and so he asked the man, 'Why are you spending so much time carving that bird into a beam that will be covered by roof? No one will ever see it.'

And the workman replied, "I do it, because God sees."

The woman continued writing, "I closed the book, feeling the missing pieces fall into place. It was almost as though I heard God whispering to me, 'I see you. I see the sacrifices you make every day, even when no one around you does. No act of kindness you've ever done, no sequin you've ever sewn, no cupcake you've ever baked is

too small for me to notice and smile over. You are building a great cathedral, but you can't see right now what it will become.'

At times, my invisibility feels like an affliction. But it is not a disease erasing my life. It is the cure for my own self-centeredness. It is the antidote to my strong, stubborn pride. I keep the right perspective when I see myself as a great builder, as one of the people who show up at a job they will never see finished, to work on something that their name will never be on."

Mothers, you are building great cathedrals in the lives of your children. No one may seem to notice the work you do. But one day, it is very possible, that the world will marvel not only at what you have built, but at the beauty that has been added to the world.

Happy Mother's Day! - to all of the invisible women. "Great job! We love you. And we salute you." Amen.