

“A House or a Home?”

Date: May 8, 2016

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: John 14:1-12

Theme: Mothers, sacrifice

Occasion: Mothers' Day

Mothers are neither as perfect as Hallmark cards would make us believe, nor are they as terrible as certain psychiatrists would have us think. And so the challenge before us today is to find a way to give God thanks for our mothers, in a way that is both credible and honest with our experience. What do I mean?

Well, on this particular day of the year, we tend to idolize our Moms, to the point many of us don't recognize any real-life figure in it. Sometimes the portrait is so perfect that some mothers may look at it and wonder, "What's wrong with me? Why can't I be the perfect mother?" Do you know what I mean?

On the other hand, Sigmund Freud and some others in the psychiatric community lay all of the blame on mothers, for all of our neuroses and hang-ups. And yes, the early, formative years do play a role in shaping who we become as we grow into adulthood. But we can't blame mothers for everything.

At some point we need to take responsibility for ourselves and quit blaming our mommies because we failed to grow up. Amen? The Gospel of Jesus Christ is one of transformation, meaning that we can change. We can't live our whole lives saying, "It's not my fault. My mother made me this way."

I guess what I'm trying to say is simply this, somehow we need to be able to look at this day, and to look back at our own experience of mother, home and family in a new way. There are no perfect

mothers. But we can still be thankful. All of us can do better, Moms and Dads. But there is still a great deal to celebrate on Mother's Day.

So, here's the tight-rope I propose we walk this morning: Let's celebrate motherhood; but let's not put so much of the burden on the back of our mothers. Let's celebrate motherhood; but let's also remember, it takes more than just a mom to make a happy home.

A reporter once came to the scene of a house fire. The house was steadily burning to the ground. He noticed a little boy standing nearby with his Mom and Dad. The reporter said, in a comforting tone, "Son, it looks like you don't have a home anymore." The little boy, about nine years old, answered courageously, "We have a home.... We just don't have a house to put it in."

Well spoken! There is a difference between a house and a home. A house is brick and mortar, wood and nails. A home is where there is love. A home is where values are taught. A home is where family cares about one another. Home is where Jesus is known, loved and taught.

As we try to navigate our way through family life in 2016, I'd like to suggest that the map and compass we need to guide us are found in today's gospel. Using the metaphor of the home, Jesus tells his disciples he is going to prepare a place for them "in his Father's house."

How nice! Heaven is like going home. "In my Father's House," is of course a metaphor for Heaven and what a wonderful image to describe the Kingdom of God. *In my Father's House* there are many rooms, and there is one prepared for you. Thomas, the Questioner,

freely admits to Jesus he has not a clue on how to get there. “Lord, we don’t know where you’re going, how do we know the way?”

Jesus, always patient in his teaching style, says, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to Father except by knowing me.” *Here* is the map and compass, and the landmark we need, to find our direction in our families. Let me repeat, mothers are not perfect people. Only Jesus was perfect.

Therefore, if we want our houses to become homes, I would suggest Jesus needs to be the center of our families.

Henry J. Heinz, aka HJ Heinz, the wealthy distributor of Heinz Ketchup and 57 varieties, made up his will. When it was read, it was found to contain the following confession. He wrote:

“Looking forward to the time when my earthly career will end, I desire to set forth at the beginning of this will, as the most important item in it, a confession of my faith in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I also desire to bear witness to the fact that throughout my life, in which there were unusual joys and sorrows, I have been wonderfully sustained by my faith in God through Jesus Christ. This legacy was left me by my consecrated mother, a woman of strong faith, and to it I attribute any success I have attained.”

Wealthy, successful HJ Heinz attributes his success to his faith in Jesus Christ. And he gives his mother the credit for passing the faith on to him. The greatest gift that any family can offer to its children is the saving knowledge of Jesus. You can buy them toys; you can give them a good education; you can offer them wonderful vacations. But the greatest gift we can give our children is to know Jesus Christ.

The Morgans were just such a family. Dr. G. Campbell Morgan had four sons and all four of them became preachers. At a family reunion a friend asked one of the sons, "Which Morgan is the greatest preacher?" The son looked at his father, looked around at his brothers and answered, "Mother."

So very often it falls upon the mother of the family to teach the children values, to take the children to Church and Sunday school, and to show them what love looks like in action. Mothers, more often than fathers, teach us by precept and example what it means to be a Christian.

Now, once again, we walk the tight-rope. We take our hats off and say thank you to moms for their spiritual guidance. Where would the Church of Jesus Christ be without the example and guidance of Christian mothers? But why does the responsibility fall exclusively, or so heavily upon the mother's shoulders?

Where are the godly men who will also teach their children, by word and deed, what it means to follow Jesus? We have many godly men at Lakewood. And still, I would challenge the Dads who are present here this morning to step up. Yes, we want to say thank you to Moms for all that they do.

But let us not abdicate our responsibility for the spiritual upbringing of our children. The responsibility of pointing children and youth in the way to follow Jesus does not belong *solely* to mothers, God bless them. Am I right? Can I get an Amen?

Not every family has the benefit of having two parents. Sometimes by choice and sometimes against their will, some women

find themselves raising a family as the sole provider, teacher, protector, nurturer and spiritual guide for their children.

In those cases, I suggest the Church has even more responsibility, to help in the Christian nurture and teaching of those children. God bless the members of our church, who go out of their way to help and be supportive of our single Moms. They need our love and support.

Raising Christian children in the world today is not easy. Perhaps it's never been easy, but the challenges facing parents today are enormous. Mothers need not only our praise and our thanks, but also our love and support, precisely because so much is expected of them. One more story:

A woman was visiting with her girlfriend, when the mother's children ran into the room. Politely they excused themselves and ran into the next room to play. The visitor, not paying attention to the words she was using, said: "Oh, I'd give my life to have two such children."

The children's mother replied, with honest sincerity, "That's exactly what it costs." Indeed it does. A mother gives her life for her children. Let us pray:

"Gracious and loving God, how much like a mother you love us – giving of yourself, sacrificing, loving and forgiving. Thank you, God for our mothers. Bless them and watch over them. Teach us, Lord, teach all of us, what it takes to turn a house into a home. Give us an extra portion of your love, that we may love one another better. Amen."