

“The Steadfast Love of a Mother”

Date: May 14, 2017

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: John 19:25-27;

Occasion: Mother’s Day

Themes: God’s steadfast love, mothers

A man was boarding an airplane one day. As he came on board he happened to notice that the head of the plane’s cockpit crew was a woman. That was no problem, yet it was a new experience for him.

As he found his seat, he noticed three persons sitting immediately behind him. One was a young boy, about six or seven years old. Next to him was a man in his early 30’s, and next to him was a woman in her early 60’s.

He didn’t mean to eavesdrop, but he couldn’t help overhearing the conversation among these three passengers. It wasn’t long before he realized they were the pilot’s family, the *female* pilot he had noticed when he boarded. The boy was her son; the man her husband; and the older woman was her mother.

Suddenly he realized why the family was on the plane. This was the first time the woman pilot had been the head of the flight crew! Obviously she had flown many times before, but this was her first as the head of the crew. They were there to honor her promotion.

The plane taxied down the runway and poised itself for takeoff. The engines began to roar and the plane gained speed quickly. Within seconds they were airborne. As the plane began to ascend and then bank to the south, the six-year old began to applaud. “Way to go, Mom! Way to go!”

This morning we are applauding our Moms. “Way to go, Moms, way to go!” Today we want to honor our mothers and say *thank you* for all of your love, for your *steadfast* love which reminds us of the love of God. In our two scripture lessons today, we take a look at Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

In the Protestant tradition, Mary doesn’t get the same respect and admiration she does in the Catholic tradition. But Mary has much to teach us about the steadfast love of God.

From the moment of the announcement of Jesus’ conception, till the moment he died on the cross, Mary was faithful to the call of God on her life. She was devoted to her Son. She models for us *both* God’s steadfast love, and the Christian’s devotion to Jesus.

On the day of His crucifixion, many of the men disciples ran away, fearful of being arrested themselves for being friends with Jesus. But who stood there at the foot of the cross, watching as Jesus suffered and died? It was His mother, Mary.

How it must have broken her heart to witness the death of her son. An angel had foretold his birth. The Holy Spirit conceived the Child. Mary birthed him, suckled him, washed him, changed his diapers, watched him take his first step and encouraged him to do his first miracle. How proud she was of her Son. How terrible, to watch Him die. But a mother’s steadfast love goes to any length to be there for her children, no matter what.

Rudyard Kipling wrote a poem about this. It goes:

“If I were hanged on the highest hill, I know whose love would follow me, still. Mother of mine, mother of mine.
If I were drowned in the deepest sea, I know whose tears would come down to me. Mother of mine, mother of mine.

If I were damned by body and soul, I know whose prayers would make me whole. Mother of mine, mother of mine.”

And isn't it true that a mother's love goes further than anyone has a right to expect. Prisoners on death row, waiting for death, are often comforted by one person – their mother. When everyone else has given up on them, a mother's love still reaches out. Mothers model the steadfast love of God. When a child has done wrong, often it is the father who criticizes, who disciplines, who gets angry.

And it is often the mother who stands beside the wrongful child – not to make excuses for what he or she has done – but to offer the love which makes it possible to try again, to do better, and to be better. A mother's love can comfort a skinned knee, a DUI ticket or an unexpected divorce. Mothers model the steadfast love of God.

It was Washington Irving who wrote these words: “A mother is the truest friend we have, when trials, heavy and sudden, fall upon us; when adversity takes the place of prosperity; when friends who rejoice with us in our sunshine, desert us when troubles thicken around us. Still will she cling to us, and endeavor by her kind precepts and counsels to dissipate the clouds of darkness, and cause peace to return to our hearts.”

It's not that mothers approve of our behavior when we get into trouble. Hardly! Especially if it's trouble of our own making. Our mothers are the very ones who want us to succeed, who want us to do well, and to become the very best person we can be. An old Spanish proverb says, “An ounce of Mother is worth a ton of priest.”

In other words, a Mother's encouraging words can often guide a child in the right direction, whereas it might take many trips to the confessional to see the priest to get going in the right direction again.

Mothers never stop worrying, so it is said. It's not that mothers don't trust their children to grow up. It's just that mothers know the kind of harm the world can do. So, when children are out of sight, mothers begin to pray, - no matter how old their son or daughter may be. Yes, mothers demonstrate God's steadfast love, a love that will not let go of us.

Jesus told his disciples before he was crucified, in John 14:18, "I will not leave you orphaned." That was a promise from God that we would never be abandoned in life. God's steadfast love is always with us. And mothers model that, so we can learn to believe it.

Gladys Aylward was a missionary to China more than 50 years ago. When the Japanese invaded Yuncheng, she couldn't leave her work behind. So, with only one assistant, Aylward led more than 100 orphans over the mountains toward free China. It was a desperate escape, one in which they thought they wouldn't make it.

After passing a sleepless night, she faced one morning with no hope of reaching safely. A thirteen year old in the group reminded her of their much-loved story of Moses and the Israelites crossing the Red Sea. "But I'm not Moses," Gladys cried in despair.

"Of course you aren't," the girl said, "but the Lord is still God." When Gladys and the orphans made it through, they proved once again that no matter how inadequate we feel, God is still God. We *can* trust God. God's love is from everlasting to everlasting. The steadfast love of the Lord is a promise we can count on, always!

Now, mothers are not perfect; they make mistakes; they have limitations. They can't be everywhere and they can't stop all the bad things from happening in the world. But in their steadfast love for their children, mothers demonstrate for us the steadfast love of God for us, we who are the children of the world.

So, this day, let us give thanks to God for our mothers who help us to see God more clearly, who help us to trust God more deeply, and who model for us the steadfast love of our Heavenly Mother. As imperfect as our mothers may be or have been, they are still a gift from God to us.

I'd like to close with just one more story. Joyce Landorf, in her book, *Tough and Tender*, relates the following. She writes: "A man I've known for some years never opened the car door for his wife, or for any other woman. He felt it was a sissy thing to do. "Besides," he was fond of saying, "she doesn't have two broken arms."

After many years of marriage, the wife died and the husband was truly broken-hearted, because he *did* love her, even if didn't always show it. When they got to the cemetery, and the pall bearers were just about to take the casket out of the hearse, the funeral director stepped up to the man.

He had known them well over the years, and he leaned in close to the bereaved husband and whispered these words, "Open the door for her, will you?" The man reached for the door handle and then froze for just a second. Because it dawned on him that he had never opened a car door for her, in her life.

Now, in her death, it would be the first, the last and the only time he did. It was a moment for him when years of regret came

crushing down upon him. My dear friends, if she's still living, don't wait till she's gone, to tell your Mom, or to tell your wife, that you love her. Tell her, and show her, before it's too late. Amen.