

## ***"Loving Our Mothers!"***

***Galatians 3:26-29***  
***May 9, 2010***

***Luke 10:25-37***  
***St. James UCC***

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***Preached by Rev. Dr. Robert Matlack***

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Years ago, I remember hearing on the radio a mother who was making a very moving statement about motherhood. She said that it's not enough to work hard preparing tasty and nutritious meals if they might contain carcinogens, and it's not enough to tuck your children safely in bed at night, when nuclear war might blow us all up. Now today we probably don't worry as much about the threat of nuclear war - although we do worry a great deal about the possibilities of nuclear and other forms of terrorism. We still worry about carcinogens in the food and the air and the water, and we worry many other things - drugs, alcohol, teenage pregnancies, drunk drivers, floods, earthquakes, oil spills, and much, much more.

What this mother was trying to remind us of, is that what happens in the world around us effects our lives. It's not sufficient to pretend that it doesn't effect us, because it does. There's no place that we can hide from the world, and no way that we can shield our children from all of the evil possibilities that lurk out there. Being a parent means that you do have to worry about the things your children will encounter in the world around them.

Back in Biblical times people had a better grasp of that reality than many of us do today. They knew that they were bound together, for better or worse. For many years the Israelite nation was a nation without physical boundaries. They had no land of their own, they were slaves down in Egypt, but they still knew who they were. They felt themselves to be bound together with all of the other Israelite people. They were a nation defined by it's people.

Even after Moses led them to the edge of the promised land, and Joshua led them into it, even after they were later conquered by powers like Babylon and many of their people were sent into exile, they believed that what happened to one person effected all of them. They believed that the whole nation could be punished for the sin of a few - or in the case of Sodom, that the entire city would be saved if but 10 righteous people could be found. When Jesus told them the parable of the Good Samaritan, he was reminding them of how God makes us one.

There are a number of interesting dynamics in this parable, which Jesus tells in response to the question, "who is my neighbor?" As you recall, in the parable a man was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, when robbers attacked him, stripped him, beat him, and left him there half dead. A priest comes by, and then a Levite - they each looked at the man and then walked on by on the other side of the road. Now priests and Levites were part of the religious leadership of the day. They held positions of status in Israelite society. They were looked up to by others, and yet they would have nothing to do with this poor man lying half dead at the side of the road.

The third man to come along was a Samaritan. Jews and Samaritans were like oil and water, they didn't mix. They didn't like each other. They didn't trust each other. Each of them thought that the other was wrong in their approach to their faith. To an Israelite audience, such as the one that Jesus told this parable to, the Samaritan was an obvious "bad guy", someone that they would want to have nothing to do with. Yet, it is the Samaritan who stops, binds up the man's wounds, and then takes him to an inn and even pays for his care.

Who is my neighbor? The Samaritan certainly answered that question differently than the priest or the Levite. In a twist that was totally unexpected by the original hearers of the parable, it was the Samaritan who understood that we are all neighbors, and that we are all called to love and help one another. In spite of the open antagonism between Jews & Samaritans, it was the Samaritan who by his actions lived out what Paul was talking about when he said, "there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free men, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus."

There are so many things in life and in our society which place artificial barriers between us. There is so much that says, he or she is different, be careful, or even - don't have anything to do with them. But Jesus offered a far different approach. He reminded the people of their responsibility to love their neighbor as they love themselves, and then He pushed them to expand their definition of who is their neighbor, to make that an inclusive instead of exclusive definition, and in a very real way to begin to understand that we are all neighbors.

You may be sitting there wondering, what does this all have to do with mothers and mother's day? Let me respond this way.

When I meet with parents before a baptism to talk about the meaning and significance of this sacrament, one of the things that I typically say is that in baptism we are reminded that God loves us. This is not a love that we have to earn or deserve, but rather it comes to us as a free gift.

I typically go on to compare God's love to the love of a parent for a child. As our children grow up, there are times when they do things that we feel are absolutely wrong. We don't like, we might even hate what they have done in a particular instance. It causes us pain and anguish, and yet our love never wavers. As parents, we don't love our children when they're good, and hate them when they're bad. We love them. Yes, some of the things they do we like while others we don't, but we always love them. That is also how God loves us.

You see, our parents teach us a great deal about God's love and how it works. Their love for us is a gift from God, a gift which not only nourishes us, but teaches and guides us as we learn how to love. This is a day when we traditionally celebrate by remembering and honoring our mothers. We celebrate who they are, and also the impact that they have had on our lives, an impact that in many ways is shaped by what they have taught us, and the gifts that they have given to us.

Rufus Jones, who was a great leader of the Quaker's, often told this story from his childhood. It seems that one day when he was 12 or 13, his mother went into town, leaving him behind on the farm with some chores. He fully intended to do the work, but his friends' beckonings to play grew too loud.

When he saw his mother's car pull into the driveway that evening, his heart sank. He knew that he was in for one of the worst whippings of his life. His mother parked the car and came into the house. She looked him straight in the eye. She didn't even have to ask.

Rufus said that he would always remember what happened next. It effected him as no whipping ever could. His mother took him upstairs to the bedroom knelt down beside him, wrapped him in her arms, and with tears streaming down her face, prayed one phrase over and over: "Lord, make a man out of him. Lord, make a man out of him."

It is said that whenever Jones told that story his voice would grow quiet and his eyes would grow misty, as he remembered that special feeling of "standing in the weeping arms of love."

As we celebrate today, honoring our mother's and offering them symbols of our love, let us particularly celebrate one of the very best things that many of our mother's have done - namely how by their love for us they have taught us to love, how they have taught us about how God loves us, and how they have taught us how God calls us to love our neighbors - all of them.

Let us pray: Loving God we thank you for the gift of our parents. We thank you for the gift of love that you gave to them, a gift which through them has spread to us. Help us to share this gift freely, for that is the spirit in which You have given it, that is the spirit in which our parents have loved us and taught us to love. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.