

“Motherhood – One Man’s Opinion”

May 11, 2008

Dr. Kipp Wolfe

1 Kings 3:16-28

At this time, will all of the women who are present here this morning please stand? All of the women, will you please stand at this time? Will the rest of you join me in expressing your appreciation to them?

Thank you. You may be seated now.

What just happened represents some of our mixed feelings about Mother’s Day. I don’t know if you women realized it or not, but what you just got was a “sitting ovation,” not a standing ovation. We do have mixed feelings about this day. I shared with the Bible study group a couple of weeks ago about a colleague of mine who said that for him and his wife this was one of the most difficult days of the year. They were childless, and he said this was a painful day for them, not a joyful day at all.

A few weeks ago, you might remember or you might not, it seems to happen so often, a van somehow got on Highway 75 headed South in the wrong lanes. It went two or three miles before, inevitably, crashing into another vehicle. It happened just about a mile from where we live. I would drive back and forth by the accident scene several times. There were skid marks on the pavement; there were those fluorescent X-marks that the police make with spray paint to indicate where the collision occurred and where the vehicles finally ended up. It was two or three weeks after the wreck happened that I noticed by the side of the road a floral arrangement that some family members had placed at the scene of that accident. But it was not a cross, the way we’ve usually seen. It was a floral arrangement of three letters, the letters M O M. Can you imagine the mixed feelings that family must have today, on Mother’s Day?

It can be a difficult time for some. For others, it can be an embarrassing time. There are some moms who seem to struggle, and quite honestly, it might be better for them and their children if they didn’t have children. Some mothers struggle in what seem to be impossible circumstances. In the past few weeks, we have seen the story of the sect in Texas. Those children were taken away from their parents because terrible things were happening to the children. On the one hand, it might be easy to criticize those mothers. “You need to take better care of your children,” we might say. But we know that they were caught in an impossible circumstance, and maybe we wouldn’t have done much better.

There was a time early in my ministry, because of these mixed feelings, that I wasn’t all that happy about preaching Mother’s Day sermons. How silly it seems for a man to speak about being a mother! I had thought, as I was preparing for this sermon,

that next year I'll talk to Carol and see if she wants to preach the Mother's Day sermon. She could surely do a better job than I. But, I love preaching about mothers on Mother's Day. It is an opportunity for me to express my appreciation to my own mother. She's been gone almost four years now, but I believe that somehow, someday, somewhere, she might be listening in today. It is an opportunity to express my appreciation to Suzanne for the kind of mother she has been and is to our children, Jace and Sara. Still, it seems a little odd for a man to speak about being a mother.

"Motherhood – One Man's Opinion" is not my opinion, however. It is the opinion of one of the wisest men the world has ever known, King Solomon. You remember in our story, just prior to the scripture that I read, Solomon has prayed to God and, in a dream, Solomon believes that God has said, "You can have anything that you want," but instead of wealth or fame or power Solomon prays for a wise and discerning mind. God grants Solomon this wisdom, and, in addition, because he asked for wisdom, God granted the other blessings to Solomon also.

There are many lessons to be learned from this story, but among the lessons are these. We read in the story that two harlots, two prostitutes, come before Solomon. In the old versions the word is "harlot," and I like that word. It has special meaning for us in the church. If you are a minister – we have several retired ministers in the church – or if you are an Elder in the church, you need to hear this. Do you remember what Jesus said about harlots? Jesus said that the tax collectors – those despised, dishonest men – that the tax collectors and harlots would go to heaven before the chief priests and the Elders.

Remember in that wonderful story by Larry McMurtry, "Lonesome Dove" there was a harlot in that story. Her name was Lori, but Gus, the hero of the story, never just called her Lori. She was always "Lori darlin'." One time, Gus was talking to a longtime lady friend who had moved away to Nebraska. He was asking this lady friend to take Lori in and let Lori live with her. When the longtime lady friend learned about Lori, she was somewhat reluctant, but Gus said, "Don't you dare hold that against her. She did the best that she could, under the circumstances."

Is Solomon saying to us, about these two mothers, "They did the best they could, under the circumstances"? We know how difficult it is being a mother. I was reminded of that just a little bit this morning. Jeremy's children were playing in the office area before the first service. They weren't misbehaving, they were just being children. They were being loud and having fun, and Jeremy came in and said something to me about, "Now you see how it is, having three kids!" One young mother said that having children is like having a bowling alley installed in your head. It's a tough job, no matter what kind of person you are.

Imagine when you're a harlot, when you're looked down on by everyone else, how tough it is. And then, imagine you have received this gift from God, and you

wake up and your child is dead. In the scripture we read that she lay on him. Today we might say the baby had SIDS, "Sudden Infant Death Syndrome." We don't know what happened. It doesn't matter. We can only imagine how desperate this mother must have been. And so, there is a switch, and the two harlots appear before Solomon, but is it Solomon who is wise, or is it the mother who is wise? We know that one of the most difficult things for any mother to do is to let go of her children.

It's difficult for fathers, too. This story is not that different from the story of Abraham and Isaac. Remember, by faith Abraham was willing to let go of his son, and these stories remind us about a God who lets go of a Son for us. One of the most difficult things that any parent can do is let go of a child, but it's not *the* most difficult thing, and it's not the most important thing. The best thing that any mother or father can do for a child is to sit down with the child and say, "I love you. You will never know much I love you, but there is One who loves you more than I do. God loves you more than I will ever love you."

One of my favorite authors is a minister by the name of John Killinger. I learned from Mark that he worked for John Killinger at one time in a Presbyterian church in California. John Killinger has written something about this love that as parents we are all called to share and show to our children. I hope you will hear these words. Killinger says,

I believe in the love of all mothers and its importance in the lives of the children they bear. A mother's love is stronger than steel, softer than down, and more resilient than a green sapling on a hillside. Her love heals wounds, melts disappointment, and enables the weakest child to stand tall and straight in the face of adversity.

I believe that this love, even at its best, is still only a shadow of the love of God, a dim reflection of all we can expect of God in this life and in the next.

I believe that one of the most beautiful sights in the world is a mother who lets God's love flow through her to her child, blessing her child and the world with the tenderness of her touch and the tears of her joy.

On this Mother's Day 2008 that is combined with Pentecost, it is my prayer that each of you mothers will know the spirit of God in your own heart. May God bless each of you, now and always. Amen