

May 9, 2010

United Church of Northfield

Acts 16:9-15, Proverbs 31: 10-31

Proverbs text at end

Mothering Character: Hospitality, Outreach & More

The Power to Make a Difference

a mothers' day sermon

Rev. Roger L. Brown

One of my favorite hymns, "Now thank we all our god," begins with the following verse:

"Now thank we all our god, with heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things hath done, in whom his world rejoices,
Who from our mothers' arms, hath blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today."

Yes, on this day, mothers day, we come to give god thanks for his wonderful gift of mothers.

This is the first Mothers' Day that I have been without my mother. As many of you know, she passed away last year at the age of 90, near the end of November. So, as we have been approaching this day, she has been much on my mind. My brother this week emailed me that he kept thinking he needed to buy a Mother's Day card, and I'm usually joining her for dinner at the nursing home near my house.

This Sunday, in today's service, we are going to remember and reflect on mothering qualities, both strong and loving, and, in our own hearts recalling our own mothers. We also want to remember all women, whether mothers or not, for their nurturing qualities. One thing is for sure, we all have a mother. Our reflections on our experience of our mother may vary from wonderful, to mixed to poor. But, we can know, that in their own way, all mothers are doing the best they can.

When I think of my mother, and her approach to loving and caring, I think most of her motto: "how can I help." I also remember her automatic and steady concern for others. Her concern is best illustrated by a little scenario I saw played out many times in her nursing home room. One of the caregivers in the nursing home would ask, "how are

you Estelle?" And she would answer, every time, "fine, but how ARE you?" My other always had a concern for others beyond a concern for herself.

She was a helper personality in the Enneagram personality approach. Interestingly, I, also am a "helper" personality.

Even though she couldn't do so much to help others, in her old age, she was always alert with concern. But for most of her life, she was very active and assertive in helping family, friends and neighbors.

Modern Mothering in the Proverbs Scripture

Our reading this morning from the book of Proverbs provides us with clues to the character of motherhood. Proverbs focuses on the description of the good wife, and declares her to be

"more precious than jewels."

Let us see what the good wife does which makes a difference.

Verse 15 says: "she rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and tasks for her maidens."

Household is the key word. For it tells us that the good wife provides for her family. Verse 21 adds: "all her household are clothed in scarlet." which means they are regally clothed. Her family is the first priority for her, so she does all she can to provide for them. Verse 28 puts an exclamation point to this by saying: "her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her."

An important way proverbs speaks of a good wife making a difference is through her labor. Among other comments, proverbs says:

"she seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands."

"she considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard."

When we think of the work of a wife, or any woman today, in view of the modern working woman, her labor may be more than just washing dishes and doing the laundry. A good wife has the power to make a difference beyond the local of her family. In the workplace, her influence may be considerable. Indeed, a woman's influence in the world of work has been around a lot longer than we may traditionally assume.

Because of my interest in the history of science, I read a book called The Mothers of Invention. It is a fascinating account of women throughout history who have invented everything from bras to antibiotics. Let me tell you about hypatia. She lived about 400 A.D. She invented a device for navigation and a device for measuring

specific gravity - essentially the same gadget that is used to tell when the temperature at which the anti-freeze in your radiator really will freeze.

Making a difference with the needy

Our scripture points to a third area where a good wife has the power to make a difference. Verse 20 says, "she opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy."

So the concern of the good wife stretches out beyond those of her household to the needs of the poor. I believe a mother who cares for her children also has that same concern for the needy. I wonder how your mother taught you to care for the needy?

Example - a minister I know of from Montana tells how she learned the importance of giving to the poor: she said her mother would give her money to go to the corner store to buy a candy bar, but that she would first have to put some money in the family thank offering box to show her thanks and help others.

This proverb points out how the woman uses her hands and arms to care for her family, to labor in the world, and provide for the poor. But what clothing does she wear?

Verse 25 says, "strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come."

Strength, of course, is not the strength of a weight lifter, but the personal strength to be there in times of need. The times when there is a need for a hug, the need for a bandaid on a scraped knee, the need for advice or someone to talk to. The strength to sit up with us when we're sick, or to bear with us through some difficult storm through which we may pass.

Dignity - she has the dignity to put some sense of manners and order in our life. A good wife has a sense of humor too, for seriousness in life, while good is not enough. Laughter is the best medicine.

On this mothers' day sunday let us thank god for the women in our lives from whose "arms we have been blessed on our way with countless gifts of love..." for their love is still ours today. Indeed, most of us have more than one mother, if you will - women who mother us, care for us, in many of the ways our own mother did or still does.

These characteristics of a good wife are characteristics we all can emulate as the characteristics of a good woman, a good father, a good sister, a good brother, or a good friend. For we too have the power to make a difference!!Making a difference

In our reading in the book of Acts this morning, we heard the story of the coming of holy spirit to a small group of people long ago. That power, the power of the holy spirit made a difference. For anyone who is in touch with the spirit, may be empowered. That power of the spirit can make a difference. A difference in the life of an individual, and a difference on the world.

It is well for us to know that a difference can be made - to think about what it means.

This is mother's day

Mothers have the power to make a difference. Father's do too.

The poet Gerhard Frost shares the following poem, entitled "Her Language." as story which had a great impact on his life:

"Christmas eve, late afternoon, (I believe I was seven),

And mother, bless her, was making something special.

Instead of the traditional jello, whipped cream and bananas, she was baking a towering pie!

I stood at her elbow, as small boys always will,

As she peeked for a moment through the partly open even door. Perfect! The meringue just right

In color and consistency; the moment had arrived.

Carefully, so cautiously, she drew it out, when suddenly

A slip of those sure hands, and a capsized tower

Slized across the floor, never to be a pie again.

And mother no weeper, (i could count the times),

Covered her face with her apron and cried.

I was outraged that God could let it happen

Because no one -- but no one --

Cries on christmas eve!

Why did she do it? Prepare this gift

For hungry little gluttons? (jello was enough!)

I know: it was her language for telling us

That we were special.

More than sixty years have come and gone,

Sixty Christmases, and i remember that one

And its gift of tears."

Proverbs 31: 10-31

A good wife who can find?

She is far more precious than jewels.

The heart of her husband trusts in her,

And he will have no lack of gain.

She does him good, and not harm,

All the days of her life.

She seeks wool and flax,

And works with willing hands.

She is like the ships of the merchant,

She brings her food from afar.

She rises while it is yet night

And provides food for her household

And tasks for her maidens.

She considers a field and buys it;

With the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.

She girds her loins with strength

And makes her arms strong,

She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.

Her lamp does not go out at night.

She puts her hands to the distaff,

And her hands hold the spindle.

She opens her hand to the poor,

And reaches out her hands to the needy.

She is not afraid of snow for her household,

Mothers: The Power to Make a Difference

For her household are clothed in scarlet.
She makes herself coverings;
Her clothing is fine linen and purple.
Her husband is known in the gates,
When he sits among the elders of the land.
She makes linen garments and sells them;
She delivers girdles to the merchant.
Strength and dignity are her clothing,
And she laughs at the time to come.
She opens her mouth with wisdom,
And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
She looks well to the ways of her household,
And does not eat the bread of idleness.
Her children rise up and call her blessed;
Her husband also, and he praises her
"many women have done excellently,
But you surpass them all."
Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,
But a woman who fears the lord is to be praised.
Give her of the fruit of her hands,
And let her works praise her in the gates.