

When the Spirit Comes, Like A Mother

May 13, 2012

Mother's Day

Ephesians 1:3-18 John 15:1-8, Acts 1:7-8 Romans 16: 1-14

Call to worship from Ephesians 1:3-18

L: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

P: who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

L: For God chose us to be holy and blameless in his sight.

P: In love God adopted us as his own through Jesus Christ,

L: In him we have redemption through his blood,

P: the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

L: Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,

P: a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance as those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

L: May God give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

P: May God open the eyes of our hearts to know the hope to which he has called us!

Acts 1:7-8 After his resurrection, Jesus showed himself to the disciples and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. When the disciples asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

John 15:1-8

^{15:1} "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Romans 16:1-16

^{16:1} I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. ² I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.

³ Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. ⁴ They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.

⁵ Greet also the church that meets at their house.

Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.

⁶ Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you.

⁷ Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.

⁸ Greet Ampliatus, whom I love in the Lord.

⁹ Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys.

¹⁰ Greet Apelles, tested and approved in Christ.

Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus.

¹¹ Greet Herodion, my relative.

Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.

¹² Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord.

Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord.

¹³ Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.

¹⁴ Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers with them.

¹⁵ Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the saints with them.

¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss.

All the churches of Christ send greetings.

Will you pray with me...

This is Mother's Day and, in keeping with our current series, we're going to linger in Judea for another week... Judea, representing that part of our world which includes our family, friends and associates; people with whom we are familiar or with whom we share common cultural background or interests.

But I also recognize that there are some here who have not been with us for this journey, so a quick recap is in order... We are in a waiting period, as were the early disciples between Easter and Pentecost. Jesus showed up several times after the resurrection and told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came. 'When the Spirit comes,' he said 'you will receive POWER to be HIS WITNESSES, in JERUSALEM, JUDEA, SAMARIA, and to the ENDS OF THE EARTH.'

The power comes from the Holy Spirit, for the purpose of being witnesses of His resurrection, of His triumph over death, of his continuing life and ministry in and through us even in this day. Along with the power and the purpose there was also a direction; starting in Jerusalem, their religious community, and moving to Judea, their family, friends and associates, then on to Samaria and eventually to the ends of the earth.

For the most part Judea is a nice place to linger. It's kind of like hanging out at Mom's house, or Grandma's. Not everything is the way we'd like it to be, but it's familiar, comfortable, welcoming. Come to think of it, a good Mom's role is a reflection of the Holy Spirit's work - empowering us to pursue a purpose in life.

A mother's love is fiercely loyal willingly sacrificing for her children; God's love is so fierce he willingly suffered death on our behalf.

A mother's love corrects rather than condones misbehavior; God does not take sin lightly and sends the Holy Spirit to teach and guide us.

A mother's love guides but does not coerce her children; God wants the best for us but allows us to make choices, and to also learn from sometimes difficult consequences.

Our culture claims freedom and tolerance as high virtues, but has neglected the reality that certain behaviors and actions have lasting, and sometimes tragic, consequences. The truth is that genuine love teaches appropriate boundaries and applies appropriate discipline to guide our young in the way that leads to life.

Mother's day is not everyone's favorite day of the year;

- those whose mothers may have passed away
- those who have bad memories of their mother; the Bible records a few of those, too.
- those who may have longed to be a mother and were not able
- those whose children may make no effort to contact you
- Anna Jarvis, credited with the establishment of Mother's Day actually regretted it in later years. She actually sued to try to stop the observance! She regretted it not because mothers did not deserve recognition, but because of the gross commercialization of the day.

Now, it is true that there are mothers who were or are abusive, neglectful, addicted, or who enabled fathers with those problems. There are many who grew up, or who are growing up in single parent families who never really got the chance to know the other parent. There are those who, for whatever reason, are not able to form adult relationships with their parents, and there are those who were unable to become parents. There are folks who chose to abort a child and can't help but wonder how life would have been different if they had made a different choice. And there are those who are now mothering their own elderly, declining parents. But for all the struggles and inconsistencies of the mothering experience, we can all agree that none of us would be here if it were not for our mothers.

I chose to use the 16th chapter of Romans as a text this morning because, in this somewhat tedious list of 28 individuals, most of whose names are difficult to pronounce, to whom Paul extends personal greetings there are no fewer than nine women; about one third of the list. That tells me that in Paul's Judea – his circle of family, friends and associates, women had a significant role. Paul frequently gets a bum rap for being a male chauvinist, but clearly he bears witness to the tremendous influence women had in the early church. In the male-dominated first century Palestine, Paul could not describe the church without mentioning the significant role of women. And in the midst of that list there is that reference to the mother of Rufus, who was also a mother to Paul. She was probably not a biological mother, but a woman of faith who cared for Paul as if he were her own son.

An interesting side note here is that there is a good possibility that this man Rufus might be the same person mentioned in Mark's Gospel as one of the two sons (Alexander and Rufus) of Simon from Cyrene who was compelled to carry the cross for Jesus. Mark's Gospel is the only one to mention the boys by name, and tradition indicates that Mark originally wrote his account of Jesus' life for the Christians in Rome where the name of Rufus might have recognition as one of their own. Paul's mention of Rufus, in his letter to the Roman church leads to a reasonable conjecture that Rufus' mother may have been the wife of Simon who brought the story of Jesus to Rome as a personal witness after his own unwitting role in the crucifixion. If so, Simon brought the witness to his Judea – his home, family, friends and associates. And in this distant place, Paul found a welcome of radical hospitality such that he called the mother of Rufus 'a mother to me.'

Such is the comfort of Judea – connections of familiarity and fondness that lead us consider each other family. Connections which reflect God's unconditional love for sinners like you and me...

Mothering is too often only defined biologically – but true mothering is far more than bearing fruit of the womb and is not limited to biological family trees. I suspect that many of us have persons in our past who were like mothers to us. I remember Marian Curry, in Key West, who would not take 'no thank you' for an answer when she expectantly invited me to lunch with her family. And I'm not talking one Sunday lunch, or every Sunday lunch. This was Monday-Friday lunch, when her son and daughter in law and grown granddaughter, and her daughter and son in law, and three grown grandsons and I all gathered around the family table. I was single at the time, and too old for any romantic interest with the granddaughter, but my presence was as expected as the rest of the family. It was a witness to God's grace, in Judea.

I remember Charity Hoffman who, when Gail and I were going through our early marriage struggles, separately invited each of us to lunch and, refusing to 'take sides' for one against the other, pledged to love us both no matter what. It was a witness to God's grace, in Judea.

And there were also those times when Gail and I loved the friends of our children as if they were our own. Gail is the first to admit that a room full of teenagers is intimidating to her. But put her one on one or with a couple of girls, even a couple of guys, and she's amazing. There are many who could say that at some point in their adolescent struggles, 'My friend's mom, Gail, was like a mother to me.' It was a witness to God's grace, in Judea.

Who were the faithful mothers of your Judea whose lives were a witness to God's loving grace and Jesus' living presence? They may have been in the church or not. They may have been teachers, counselors, parents of friends, or even friends of our adult years with whom we connected in a special way. We also honor these today, those through whose influence we have received a second birth in Christ.

When the Spirit comes we will receive POWER to be his WITNESSES...

Even as we honor those who gave us life this day, we know that the greatest tribute we can pay them is to emulate their example by leading others to faith in Christ Jesus... by our witness in Jerusalem, and Judea, in Samaria and the ends of the earth...

And, who are those to whom we witness by our lives, in our Judea? Those whom we love with the unconditional love of a good parent, in the fullness of God's embracing grace? What is our witness to those who, though they may not be in the household of faith, are yet close to us in our associations and affections?