

Honouring Mothers

A Sermon by Rev. Joel Christian Glenn

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Children's Talk: Being Like Mom

Who is today all about? Mothers, of course! Today is the day that we honour mothers. The Lord tells us to do this in the Ten Commandments:

Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which Jehovah your God is giving you. (Exodus 20:12)

We thank them for all of the love and goodness they give us. What are a few of the things that we can thank mothers for?

I hope that today you get a chance to show how much you love your moms. But I also want you to think about how you can be like your moms, and follow their example. The best way to honour someone is by living a good life. The Lord tells us in the Word what we can do to be like a mother:

Then one said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You."

But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother." (Matthew 12:46-50)

Whoever does the will of His Father in heaven is like the Lord's mother (and brother and sister). Doing what the Lord wants is how we can honour mothers every day.

So what are some of the ways that you and I can copy our mothers and do what the Lord wants us to do?

Our mothers have given us such a good example to follow. Let's make sure they feel all the love today for giving us that amazing gift.

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Today we honour mothers. For most of us it probably goes without saying that honouring our mothers is a worthwhile thing to be doing. At the same time we can always look a little deeper into the reasons that we honour motherhood, and with that deeper understanding comes an even greater appreciation for what we honour in mothers. So today we are going to take a look at what makes mothers so worthy of being honoured with this special day.

The Word teaches us quite clearly that we are to honour parents, both mothers and fathers. The fourth commandment states,

Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which Jehovah your God is giving you. (Exodus 20:12)

That one of the top ten most important rules that God has given includes this command to honour parents indicates just how important that role is in our lives. Other laws in the Old Testament imposed the death penalty for striking or cursing parents. While these laws no longer apply in a literal sense, they bring home the honour that is due to parents.

The teachings of the New Church take these Old Testament rules and explain the various ways that they are still instructive. Here is how the book True Christian Religion explains the fourth commandment, and in it we see a description of just why parents are so important:

Honouring your father and your mother in the earthly meaning, which is the literal meaning, includes honouring our parents, obeying them, being devoted to them, and thanking them for the benefits they have given us - for feeding and clothing us, introducing us into the world so that we may become civil and moral people within it, and introducing us into heaven through religious instruction. In this way our parents have cared for our prosperity in time and our happiness to eternity. They do all these things from a love they have from the Lord, whose role they have played. In a comparable sense, it also means

that wards whose parents have died are to honour their guardians. (*True Christian Religion* §305)

This passage indicates two areas in which our parents provide for us and for which we can be grateful. The first is physical care: mothers provide food, clothing, shelter, education, gifts, and common sense guidance. And we are right to be grateful to our mothers for providing these blessings. But more deeply, parents provide us with spiritual care: an experience of genuine love that remains with us forever; a conscience built firmly on right and wrong; knowledge of the Lord and His teachings, and a love for living a good life. These gifts prepare us for a spiritual life in this world and a heavenly life in the world to come. There is no greater gift that a parent can give.

These blessing that mothers give ultimately come from a love that is planted in them from the Lord. I think this underlying love is perhaps what we can most honour in our mothers. When I was recently talking to a group of older folks about Mother's Day, and I asked them what they were most grateful to their mothers for, the emphatic and resounding answer was love. Pure and simple. Motherly love, received from the Lord by a parent, is enduring and all-encompassing. We see an image of it even in the Lord reaction to the worst of the worst people, who were on the verge of executing Him. As Jesus approached Jerusalem, He looked out and compared His love for these people to that of a mother:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! (Matthew 23:37)

If the Lord's love can be so great even for the evil, how much greater must it be towards the entire human race? It is this great love that mothers tap into when they provide for their children physically and spiritually. Of course we should honour this!

But I also want to spare a thought for those who did not receive such love from their mothers; or at least who struggle to feel that they received it. As much as we would like for every family to be loving and whole, there are families where the love is not there or is not felt. Some people listening may have a conflicted relationship, or even no relationship to speak of, with their mothers. That is a hard reality to live in, especially on a day like today. As I was preparing for this sermon I came across a passage that I think speaks to this hardship, and offers perhaps some hope. It begins this way:

But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me,
And my Lord has forgotten me."
"Can a woman forget her nursing child,
And not have compassion on the son of her womb?" (Isaiah 49:14-15)

At first this passage seems like it is putting forward a rhetorical question: can a mother forget her child? "Of course not!" we want to say. And yet that is not actually the point of this passage, as we can see in the continuation:

Surely they may forget,
Yet I will not forget you.
See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands;
Your walls are continually before Me. (Isaiah 49:15-16)

A mother may indeed forget her child. But the Lord will never forget you. The love that He has for you, the love that should have come through your mother, is still available from the Lord. It may not take away the pain of not having received it, or not receiving it as you would like, from your biological mother. But you are not any less loved for that.

On a broader level, we don't think of the Lord as our mother. Rather, He is our Father, as we say daily in the Lord's Prayer. So if the Lord is our Father, who is our Mother, spiritually speaking? The answer given by the Word is that the Church is our mother. Just as a mother feeds her children with physical nourishment, so the church

feeds people with spiritual nourishment (True Christian Religion §306). Not the Church in terms of one congregation or denomination, but the Church as that community of people who look to the Lord and commit to following Him. Jesus taught this when Mary and His brothers were looking for Him:

While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. Then one said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You." But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother." (Matthew 12:46-50)

Whoever does the will of His Father in heaven is like a mother, as well as brother and sister. This is the definition of a church that can be a spiritual mother for us.

I hope that all of us in this room and listening online are committed to being the church in that sense. But just making an intellectual commitment is not all that it takes. We must go through the process of putting that intention into action. A mother is a mother because of what she has and continues to do; and a church is only a church if it does the same on a spiritual level. So what would the church need to do so that people would feel the same love and affection for it that they feel towards their mothers?

If we went back to the beginning we talked about how we can honour mothers for all the spiritual ways that have nurtured us, and especially for the love from the Lord that is unconditional. The church is here to do the same thing. It can nurture us in many ways, too many to list; but I'll give a shot at mentioning a couple of the things that might help us all feel more love and affection for the church as our mother.

For example, one quality that mothers often have is to be there for their children no matter what. No matter the little conflicts or hurts a little one suffers, mom

is always there to make things better. As a church we can always be there when people suffer. When can simply hear them and hold them, empathize with them and love them, and let them know that they are not alone. When any of us does this individually or as a group, we are living the life of the church as a mother.

Another example is that mothers protect and care for those who cannot protect and care for themselves. A little child is helpless without food and clothing and protection. Although we might see ourselves as strong independent adults, spiritually many of us are helpless and vulnerable. We may say that we don't need anyone, but really we all need others to have our back and deflect the hurts that life throws our way. When we protect people, and turn them off of a dangerous path towards a better way of life, and shelter them from the assaults of hell, we are living the life of the church as a mother.

This process is a challenge to go through. In fact, it mirrors the challenges of pregnancy and birth. Before a mother becomes a mother (at least biologically: of course there are many who fill the mother role who have not given birth) she must first go through months of pregnancy and all that it entails, as well as the birthing itself. I cannot speak from experience of course, but this process takes immense patience and can be frustrating and painful. The same is true of the church and individuals as we try to take the truth we have learned from the Lord and develop it into a way of life that can be born into the world as various practical uses.

Although living the life of the church is a challenge, it also leads to real joy. The Lord promises us this in the Gospel of John using the illustration of a woman going through birth pains:

Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. A woman, when she is in labour, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the

anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you. (John 16:20-22)

We can push through the short term frustrations and become a church that brings new life into the world, a life of wisdom and love.

This Mother's Day we honour mothers for all that they have done for us. We also honour all who have embodied the Lord's love for children, and who have radiated that love out into the world whether they themselves had children of their own or not. And we hope that all of us can embody more of that motherly love as we strive as a community to care for those around us.