

Mother's Day Sermon 2017

There's an **old Jewish proverb** which says: *"God could not be everywhere and therefore he made mothers."* Growing up that seemed to be true, and even if she wasn't there physically she seemed to have an uncanny sense of what sort of mischief I was getting into or about to get into.

Abraham Lincoln wrote: *"All that I am or every hope to be, I owe to my angel Mother."*

President George Washington once said: *"My mother was the most beautiful woman I ever saw. All I am I owe to my mother."*

Similarly, the great inventor **Thomas Edison** attribute his success in life to his mother: *"I did not have my mother long, but she cast over me an influence which has lasted all my life. The good effects of her early training I can never lose. If it had not been for her appreciation and her faith in me at a critical time in my experience, I should never likely have become an inventor. Her firmness, her sweetness, her goodness, were potent powers to keep me in the right path were the making of me. The memory of her will always be a blessing to me."*

See if any of you can relate to the astute observation of the late writer **Erma Bombeck** who stated, *"When your mother asks, 'Do you want a piece of advice? It is a mere formality. It doesn't matter if you answer yes or no. You're going to get it anyway."*

I would imagine many of you would heartily agree with **Mark Twain's** observation of his mother. *"My mother had a slender, small body, but a large heart - a heart so large that everybody's joy found welcome in it, and hospitable accommodation."*

And mothers, if at the end of today's Mother's Day you feel neglected remember the astute observation of **ex-baseball player, Sam Ewing**, who once said: *"Mothers, when you feel neglected, think of the female salmon, who lays 3 million eggs but no one remembers her on Mother's Day."*

It's widely reported that on one occasion a London editor submitted to **Winston Churchill** for his approval a list of all the teachers he'd had in his life. Churchill looked at the list, handed it back to the reporter and said, *"You have omitted to mention the greatest of my teachers - my Mother."*

And it's absolutely true that our mothers taught us a variety of very important things on a wide variety of topics.

Things our Mothers Taught Us List:

She taught me **logic**: *"If everyone else jumped off a cliff would you do it too?" "Because I said so, that's why"*

She taught me **medicine**: *"If you don't stop crossing your eyes, they're going to freeze that way."*

She taught me about **foresight**: *"Make sure you wear clear underwear, in case you're in an accident."*

She taught me about **genetics**: *"You are just like your father."*

She taught me about the **circle of life**: *"I brought you into this world, and I can take you out of it."*

She taught me about my **farming roots**: *"What, were you born in a barn."*

She taught me about **anticipation**: *"Just wait until your father gets home."*

She taught me about **payback**: *"One day you will have kids and I hope they are just like you."*

She taught me about the importance of **prayer**: *"You'd better pray that stain comes out of the carpet."*

In the Bible there are many great models of motherhood for us to be inspired by.

- **Boldness of the mother of the sons of Zebedee (James and John)** who boldly asked Jesus to grant her two sons seats on the right and left in his future kingdom.

- **Brokenhearted Hannah** who hadn't been able to bear her husband any children and out of her anguish she poured her heart out to God, promising that if God granted her a child she would dedicate him to the Lord's service for their entire life.
- **Loyalty** is displayed in **Ruth the Moabite** who left the comfort and safety of her homeland to move with her mother-in-law back to her homeland where Ruth knew nobody and would likely experience rejection. But God granted her favor and not only did He give her a husband but also a son and she ended up becoming the great grandmother of king David.

This morning we're going to look briefly at the courage and faith of a woman who is unnamed. We know she's a widow that God had plans for her life that she was unaware of. She was minding her own business trying to provide for her son and herself in the midst of a widespread famine that had swept across the land for the past 3 years. But despite her best efforts she'd come down to the very last portion of food. Things had become quite desperate when God stepped in and demonstrated his love and awareness of her needs.

Please listen as I read about this remarkable story from **1 Kings 17:1-16**

Elijah tells the woman "*Don't be afraid.*" Someone has said that there are 366 instances of God telling people to "not be afraid" in Scripture. I've never been able to find that many but God certainly does tell people not to be afraid a lot. What God often does is bring us right to the edge of our fears, to the point where we can't pull this off on our own strength and might and resources, and then teaches us that He is enough. Because if we can always provide for our needs then we don't learn real reliance upon God.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" is the first sentence out of Jesus' mouth of his very first sermon. In preaching class they teach you to start off your sermon with an attention grabbing first statement. Jesus would have certainly got an A for that opening line because in that culture and often in ours as well, poverty is seen as a curse from God and wealth often is seen as a blessing or a stamp of approval by God. But God doesn't operate that way.

In that statement, Jesus is saying,

- *"Blessed are you when you don't have enough."*
- *Blessed are you when you can't figure it out or dig yourself out of your current problem.*
- **The Message translation says:** *"Blessed are you when you're at the end of your rope."*

For it's when we come to the end of ourselves that Jesus meets us there because then there's finally room enough for Jesus to show up.

Most of us would prefer not to live being *"poor in spirit."* We don't want to be destitute, not be able to figure out a way out of our situation because that will reflect badly on us. It would say that perhaps we mismanaged our finances or made poor decisions to bring us to this point. And we don't want to look bad.

To be poor in spirit means you've come to the end of your striving and clawing and struggling to make it. You can't look good and you realize you need help.

12 Steps of AA

1. Admit you're powerless over alcohol – that our lives have become unmanageable.
2. Come to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Make a decision to turn your will and life over to the care of God.

We don't want to be *"poor in spirit."* But we know to be *"rich in spirit"* would probably describe a person who's prideful and haughty and we know God despises them. So we'd prefer to be **"middle class"**

in spirit.” That way we keep God neatly tucked away in our back pocket and go to Him when we really need Him. Keep God in reserve in case of an emergency. We want God to be our co-pilot. Assisting us to get through the storms of life. But Jesus didn't list that as an option for His followers. God doesn't want to be your assistant. Many Christians want to follow Jesus close enough that they can get Jesus' help and benefits but not so close that it requires everything from them. But Jesus didn't offer us His help to make our lives easier. He defined what it meant to be a follower of His this way.

Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” (Luke 9:23-24 (NIV))

That means giving up my agenda and following God's agenda for my life. That's what Jesus did every day and that's what Elijah had been living for 3 years. Every day ravens would come by, morning and evening, with bread and meat. This happened every day for 3 years during the drought the Lord had declared would happen.

Elijah certainly had learned total dependence upon the Lord during this time. And the widow is at that point as well. Did you notice in her response to Elijah that she was down to the very last morsel of food she owned. Elijah encountered her at the very brink of eating her very last meal. She was gathering up sticks for a fire to cook the very last loaf of bread for her and her son, and then the plan, in her mind, was that would be it. They would then starve to death together after this last supper.

Notice that God calls Elijah, who had learned to be totally dependent upon God, to meet up with a destitute widow to provide him with food. Why did God do this? Did God run out of meat and bread to bring Elijah? No! Were the ravens going on strike? No! Then why did God decide to quit feeding Elijah? And why did God choose a destitute widow, of all people, to be the one asked to provide Elijah with his next meal? Why not call upon a well to do couple? Because they wouldn't have learned the lessons and appreciated the blessings that this penniless widow would have and did. Did you notice that God tells Elijah that He had prearranged and commanded this woman to provide food to Elijah. But in the interchange between Elijah and the woman it certainly doesn't appear that she is following God's command here. And I'm convinced this is how God works oftentimes. We don't hear an audible command from God, but He prompts our hearts and puts us just in the right spot at the right time to receive His blessing and to see His love demonstrated through the actions of others.

And yet, even in that scenario it still depended upon her response to Elijah's request. What if she'd said NO to his request for some bread? She would have missed out on God's blessing and His deepening of her faith.

Let me ask you – how has God used situations to teach you dependence upon Him in the past and where perhaps is He leading you right now to receive His blessing and learn a greater level of dependence upon Him?

Notice what Elijah asks her to do. He asks her to **first** make a loaf of bread for him and then go back and make a loaf for her and her son and to trust God that He will provide enough oil and flour to make more for her son. Don't you kind of wonder how this came down? Here's how I envision it happening. She used up the very last bit of flour and oil to make Elijah's bread. I expect that both the jug of oil and the jar of flour were completely empty when she went to take Elijah his bread. But when she came back God had put more back into it. And seeing how God works at other times, I doubt the flour and oil containers were filled up by God. I imagine God giving just enough, each time, for one more loaf of bread. Because it's never about the amount of flour and oil God will provide. It's much more about learning dependence upon God. The act of giving this loaf of bread first to Elijah is referred in the Old Testament as a **gift of first fruits**. God had instituted this when he set up the various festivals. When they brought in a harvested crop from the field, the Israelites were required to offer up to God the very first section of the harvest to God as an offering. It was a risky offering because if something were to happen and destroy the rest of the field during the night, you'd be out of produce to feed your family with or to sell. You'd have just given it all to God. It was an act of faith to give God the first and not the leftovers. You see, God's as concerned as what you give or how much you give as He is with why you give. Because He

knows a little secret. If you give out of faith and gratitude to God and give joyfully – you will also give sacrificially and abundantly.

Remember when Jesus and his disciples sat outside the temple and watched all of these people entering in and dropping their financial offerings into the container. I can imagine each person taking their \$10 and breaking into all pennies so that everyone would be able to hear and be impressed with the clanging of the money against the bottom of the metal container. But the only one Jesus commented on was the widow who gave her very last coin to God.

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. 42 But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “*Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.*” (Mark 12:41-44 (NIV))

Monetarily this poor widow didn't put in more than everyone else did, but she gave sacrificially to God. She gave her last two coins to God and was trusting that He would continue to sustain her life. It's not about the amount but about the heart. There's no law that required her to give her last two coins to God but she wanted to and did. It's safe to say that she gave extravagantly and out of faith. It doesn't say what happened to her but I bet it's safe to say that God blessed this widow's life, as He also did with the widow who fed Elijah. With that widow every day God gave her enough to sustain her for that day. She definitely learned the power to Jesus' prayer when he asked, “*Give us this day our daily bread.*” Most of us believe we could provide for our daily bread but here's two examples where neither of them could – unless God stepped forward and provided it. And that's where your faith grows tremendously deeper. When you need God to come through or it's over and you wait on God. Waiting on God can be scary but it can also be unprecedented growth in your faith and trust in God.

And so let me ask you – in what area of your life are you trusting God for?

Joni Eareckson Tada notes, “*When life is rosy, we may slide by with knowing about Jesus, with imitating him and quoting him and speaking of him. But only in suffering will we know Jesus.*” We learn things about God in suffering that we can't learn any other way.

Isaiah 41:13 (NIV) *For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.*

Psalms 73:26 (NIV) *My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*

Back at our story with Elijah and the widow, a period of time goes by in which God daily provides just enough flour and oil for the widow, her son and Elijah to continue to live on. But apparently the widow and Elijah still needed to go deeper in their dependency and trust in God.

Remember, God isn't as concerned with **comfort** as He is with your **Christlikeness**.

Not only in our story this morning, but also through the life of every mother, one of the most important things He wants for you to do is to deepen your relationship with God through daily dependence upon Him and then to pass on that valuable lesson to your children as well. Your children desperately need to see Christ living in you and reflected to them. They need to see the depth of your faith as you see you depending upon God for your daily needs. As they see that in and through you, you'll be passing on one of the greatest lessons a mom can ever teach their child – that of faith and dependency upon God.

Invitation time.

Mother's Day 2017

Describe the faith of your mother?

How did your mothers' faith (or lack of it) affect your walk with the Lord?

What are you afraid of?

How is God trying to grow you in that area of your life?

Which spiritual condition best describes you?

- Poor in spirit
- Middle class in spirit
- Rich in spirit

12 Steps of AA:

1. Admit you're _____
2. Come to believe that a _____ greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Make a _____ to turn your will and life over to the _____ of God.

Being "*poor in spirit*" involves giving up my _____ and following God's _____ for my life.

How has God used situations to teach you _____ upon Him?

In what areas of your life are you trusting God for?

God isn't as concerned with your _____ as He is with your _____.

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