

Order of Worship
Fifth Sunday of Easter
Mother's Day
May 10, 2020

(Read the prayers and scripture readings and recite the Creed aloud, even if you are by yourself, in order to hear with the ears each one. Sing or read the final hymn aloud.)

Prepare for worship: Sit in silence or with soft music for a few moments

Call to Worship: *Sanctuary*
Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true.
With thanksgiving, I'll be a living sanctuary for you.

Opening Prayer:

We gather today O God, our guide and guardian, remembering those who have nurtured us, protected us and helped us grow. We give you thanks for homes that accepted us and affirmed us as your precious children. In the shelter of your healing love, fortify us as living stones, and build us into a spiritual home where all are welcome. In the name of Christ, our foundation and cornerstone, we pray. Amen

Affirmation of Faith Apostles' Creed

Prayer (Silent Prayer may follow each petition)

For our mothers, who have given us life and love,
that we may show them reverence and love,
we pray to the Lord...

For mothers who have lost a child through death,
that their faith may give them hope,
and their family and friends support and console them,
we pray to the Lord...

For women, though without children of their own,
who like mothers have nurtured and cared for us,
we pray to the Lord...

For mothers, who have been unable to be a source of strength,
who have not responded to their children
and have not sustained their families,
we pray to the Lord...

Loving God, as a mother gives life and nourishment to her children, so you watch over your Church. Bless all women, that they may be strengthened as Christian mothers. Let the example of their faith and love shine forth. Grant that we, their sons and daughters, may honor them always with a spirit of profound respect. Grant this through Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray.

The Lord's Prayer

Prayer of Illumination:

Open our ears that we may hear and our hearts and minds that we may receive your word
O Lord, our rock and redeemer.

(After each reading take two to three minutes to reflect upon the meaning of the passage to you today.)

New Testament Reading Acts 7: 55-60

Psalm 31

Epistle Reading 1 Peter 2: 2-10

Special Music *A Tribute to Mothers* Christopher McCroskey

Gospel Reading John 14:1-14

Sermon Motherhood and the Christian Family

Hymn *Happy the Home When God is There (UMH 445)* Christopher McCroskey

Benediction :

We are members of God's family. May our homes be a place of refuge from the trials of the world and where faith is sown and nurtured. We are God's own people. Let us proclaim the mighty acts of God so all may know God's mercy. Amen

Response: *God Be With You till We Meet Again*

God be with you till we meet again;
by his counsels guide, uphold you,
with his sheep securely fold you;
God be with you till we meet again.

Motherhood and The Christian Family
5/10/2020

Mother's Day/ Festival of the Christian Home

Today is Mother's Day. This year it might be easy to forget as many of the things that we would normally do to honor our mothers, such as taking her out to eat, we are unable to do. Some of us may not be able to visit with our mothers or have our children visit because of restrictions due to the virus, particularly if your mother is in a nursing home or assisted living facility. Mothers who have children at places like Epworth or in care where they would normally have some sort of visitation may not be able to visit with their children this year. Mothers who have children in prison may not be able to visit this year. So, this year, Mother's Day may be tinged with sadness. As many mothers and children are unable to be together this Mother's Day, we need to acknowledge our sadness as we reflect upon Motherhood and the Christian Family.

When we say family, the image that most often comes to mind is that of the nuclear family: father, mother and two children. We may still hold to the image of *Father Knows Best*, *Leave It to Beaver*, and those other early TV shows. Mother is a woman who can clean house, cook meals, bake cookies, fix lunches, get Dad off to work and the kids off to school and do the shopping, while wearing a skirt and blouse, high heels, full make up, never having a hair out of place and nary a stain on her crisp white apron. Father sits in his chair, reading the newspaper dispensing wisdom. The kids may get into mischief but always come around to do the right thing. Whatever problems the family may face everything is resolved in 30 minutes.

We know too well that these images are not always the image of family. More and more we see families where the parents are divorced or separated. We see more families where both parents work. We see many families where grandparents are raising children and multigenerational families. We see families with absent fathers or mothers. We see families where there are ongoing problems of addiction and abuse - psychological, verbal, physical, sexual. We see families living in the streets and out of their cars.

We may bemoan that families today are not what they used to be. We may long for a return to that "traditional" family. But when we really consider the history of

the family, we can see that the nuclear family is a very recent concept, and may not necessarily be a very real concept. I did not grow up in a nuclear family. I grew up with my mother, grandparents and two brothers. Many others growing up in that *Father Knows Best* era did not live in that type household. There were divorced parents even then. There were families with problems of abuse then. The sad thing is that there came the idea that the nuclear family was ideal and others were “broken.”

Yes, families are broken. We may easily blame that on the fact that women are no longer staying at home but working outside the home. Women should stay at home and be mothers, not doctors, lawyers, CEO's or preachers. Women should be like June Clever.

But what if a woman was given the gift by God to be a doctor, lawyer, CEO or preacher? What if God called her to be something else in addition to being a mother? A man can be a father and still follow God's call for them. Why can't a woman be a mother and still follow God's call for them? I know many may cite scripture, particularly the household codes that are embedded in some of the epistles. These codes may be more reflective of the cultural norms of the Greco-Roman world than of God's instructions, for they are found in other “secular” writings of the time.

So, what do we see as the Christian mother of today? She follows God's call in her life. If it is to stay at home and care for the children, so be it. But if God is calling her into some other profession in addition to being a mother then she should, as a Christian, follow the call of God.

For a Christian mother is not one that plays a certain normative role of behavior but one that provides life, refuge, nurturance, and guidance. She provides life, not just giving birth to a child, but providing quality of life for the child. By providing nurturance - physical, spiritual, intellectual and emotional - so the child may grow to be what God created them to be. She provides a refuge, a place where the child may go to receive comfort when hurt or distressed. She provides guidance so the child may follow the path God has for it. It is not the role that makes a Christian mother but what she instills in and is for the child, one that strives only for the best for the child so that the child may grow to be what God created that child to be.

These are things that a Christian mother is. Notice that these are not limited to a woman that gives birth, that is physical birth. There are some women who may give birth to a child but the best thing may be for them to give up the child, for that is what is best for the child. There are women who can provide nurturance, refuge, guidance and even life for a child even though they did not have biological children. These are those who may have stepped in when a mother could not provide for a child: foster mothers, adoptive mothers, those who may be housemothers at a place like Epworth. It is women in the life of a child who provide the nurturance, refuge and guidance that enhances the life of a child even though they may not be the biological mother. They are still mothers.

While these are what the Christian mother provides, it is also what the Christian family provides. The family provides a place of refuge where we can get away from the cares and worries of the workplace. The family is a place where we can feel protected in the same way the psalmist says that God is a refuge and fortress.

The Christian family is also a place of nurturance. It is a place where pure, spiritual milk is given so that all members of the family may grow into salvation. It is where we get what is needed to grow physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. It is a place where one receives guidance to become what God created them to be.

A Christian family is one where members receive mercy, that is, the freedom that comes from forgiveness. It is a place where the value of relationships is greater than the need for fairness, where wrongs are not held as a barrier between members. There have been plenty of times when family members have made me so angry, but my love for them overrode any anger that I may have felt. The relationship was more important than anything else, especially hanging on to trivial hurts and angers.

What do we mean when we say the Christian family? Do we mean a family of father, mother and children and no other? Does it include aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews? Does it include grandparents and grandchildren? I think not. I don't think that it is the form, the makeup, that makes a family a Christian family. A Christian family can be a multigenerational family. It can be a family with no children just two adults. It can be a family without biological children, with adoptive or foster children. It can be a family with just one parent. It can be

people with just something in common living together like a half-way house. It can even be an “institution” like Epworth Children’s Home. The Christian family includes all of these, and more.

The Christian family is not limited to just biology, or people living in one building or even people who come to the same church. We have our biological family. We may have our neighborhood family or a communal family of people living together in one building or area. We may have our church family that comes together (hopefully soon). But none of these alone comprise the Christian family. The Christian family includes all of God’s people for we are God’s own people, created in the image of God, who have received God’s mercy.

The Christian family includes everyone. Therefore, we are to protect and work for what is best for all members of the family. Even if it means giving up something we long for, like coming to church, in order to protect the family from the spread of disease. We are to give nurturance and guidance to all around us, to give mercy as we have been given mercy, so that all may know the marvelous light of God and enter into his house with room enough for everybody.