

Rev. Mike Cole  
 Providence Presbyterian Church  
 Fourth Sunday of Easter  
 May 11, 2025  
 Revelation 21:1-6; John 13:31-35

"Table Talk"

Some preachers fear preaching on Mother's Day. First, because there is a definite tendency to lapse into sentimentality. Second, because it is a secular day rather than a religious day. Third, because, while most of us have enjoyed positive and loving relationships with our mothers, there are some folks who do not look upon their mother with favor or pleasant memories.

However, preaching on Mother's Day doesn't intimidate me because it is one of the great unifying days of the year. It reminds us that we all have at least this one thing in common - everyone here was given birth by a mother. We all entered the world through our mother. Whether the woman we call "Mom" is our biological mother or our adopted mother, it was she who gave birth to us. It was she who nursed, nurtured, and nourished us for life in the world. She literally gave us life.

That's not to disparage or downplay the role of our father, because father's turn comes on June 15. It is, however, to acknowledge the powerful role played by the first woman in our lives. To illustrate the role of mothers: Mothers are a **source of information**.

A little boy asked his mother where he came from, and also where she had come from as a baby. His mother gave him a tall tale about a beautiful white-feathered bird. The boy ran into the next room and asked his grandmother the same question, and received a variation on the bird story. He then scampered outside to his playmate with the comment, "You know, there hasn't been a normal birth in our family for three generations!" Mothers are a source of **Information**.

Mothers are a source of illustration. Three mothers were bragging about their sons. "My son is a wealthy lawyer," said one. "For my birthday he gave me this fur coat." Said the second, "My son is a medical doctor and last winter he gave me a vacation in Miami beach." The third thought for a moment and then blurted out, "My son sees a fancy psychiatrist every week. He pays the psychiatrist \$500 an hour. And guess who he spends his time talking about - ME!" **Mothers are a source of Illustration**.

Mothers are a source of **interpretation**. A five-year-old lad was watching his mother change the baby. When she overlooked sprinkling the tot's backside with talcum powder and hurried him into his diaper, the five-year-old reproved her sharply, "Hey, Mom, you forgot to salt him!" Mothers are a source of **Interpretation**.

And mothers are a source of **inspiration**. A certain mother was called out of town unexpectedly to care for an ailing relative. She left in a hurry, reminding her husband and children to take good care of the house. After more than a week had passed without a word from her family, the mother began to wonder if she were missed. However, a letter from her youngest son removed all doubts. "Dear Mom:" the letter began. "Since you went away, this is the biggest house I ever saw." Mothers are a source of **Inspiration**.

Those of us who have cherished our relationships with our mothers, and have lost them to death, know the deep emptiness their absence causes within our spirit. I realize that not everyone has a wonderful relationship with their mother. That saddens me because of the burden it places on the child, who, more often than not, assumes the blame for the less-than-ideal relationship. When that is the case, I have found that the child usually finds a substitute mother, someone who exhibits the ideals of motherhood - compassion, empathy, grace, gentleness, self-sacrifice, and love.

This morning's sermon, as you might have guessed, will draw some parallels between motherhood and the love which Jesus commanded us to exhibit in our lives and relationships. If your relationship with your mother is unfulfilling, you don't have to stop listening. When I speak of motherly love, if you can't think of your mother, think instead of someone whose love epitomizes Christ-like love. Whether we have enjoyed a loving relationship with our mother or with a maternal substitute, we can relate those qualities of love to the qualities Christ calls us to exhibit.

Today's scripture from John takes place in the upper room where the disciples had gathered for the last supper. It is there that Jesus washes the disciples' feet and predicts his imminent death. It is through the upper room door that Judas leaves to do his despicable deed of betrayal. No sooner does the door close behind Judas than Jesus says, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified and God has been glorified in him."

"Excuse me," the disciples think to themselves, "you're glorified by this betrayal. That's not exactly our idea of glory. We had something more in mind, like a festival or a coronation." The first thing we ought to notice in this conversation at the table is that God's idea of glory is totally different from ours. God's idea of glory is fleshed out upon the cross.

As hideous as that death is, it makes His victory on Easter that much more glorious. God was willing to endure the pain, shame and humiliation in order to reveal His true nature.

God willingly suffered so that we might have new life. Jesus showed us that the way to glory is through sacrifice. In a sense, mothers have known that for eons.

The glory of motherhood isn't accompanied by festivals, bright lights and awards. The glory of motherhood comes with chauffeuring kids to baseball games and ballet lessons, cooking meals that sometimes get cold before anyone sits down to eat, cleaning wounds and peeling band aids. To be honest, it's not exactly what a woman thinks of when she is first told that she is to be a mother. It's not exactly her idea of the glory of motherhood. But most women grow into the role and play it exceedingly well. In doing so, the glorious rewards come in small packages.

Donna Jordan, a kindergarten teacher in New Jersey, has collected comments from her students about their mothers, which she prints in a booklet, with illustrations, for each mother. Here are a few of the comments which glorify motherhood: **Mom is best at** - "feeding the dog," "making my bed," "driving," "cleaning," "running," "riding a two-wheeler," and "watering the garden." **If I had enough money, I'd buy her** - "flowers," "a car," "a necklace," "a brand new fan," "a kitten," "a diamond ring," "a big pack of bubble gum." **It makes me feel good inside when Mom says** - "I love you," "I'll buy you something," "good job," "dinnertime," "you look handsome." This is glorification that you just can't measure.

Once Jesus had revealed his definition of glory, he moved on in the conversation to say, "Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'"

The disciples got whiplash from the double-take they did after that statement. They were not concerned with Jesus calling them "little children," because the term he used was one of endearment. What upset them was the link between themselves and the Jews. Even though most of the disciples were Jews, they held themselves apart from those who represented the status quo. In their minds, they were very different from "them." But Jesus made it very clear that there is no "us" and "them," there is only "us" and "him." None of them, and consequently, none of us have any reason to boast of our position in the kingdom of God.

Jesus was not only the right man for the job of saving humanity, he was the only man for the job. He accomplished in his death what no one else could have accomplished in life - the balancing of the scales for humanity. The final topic of this segment of Jesus' table talk was a new commandment: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.

Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Jesus was not speaking of love in the abstract, some esoteric notion of deep feeling. He was speaking of love in action.

When people who have just performed some heroic, life-endangering deed in order to save another are asked how they "felt" about what they were doing while they were doing it, the reply is usually "nothing." Here's a stranger who helped pull three children out of a burning house: "I didn't even think about it. It was happening so fast, and I knew we just had to get them out of there." Here's a mother who lifts a tree off her son's leg: "I didn't even feel how heavy it was - until I put it down."

When love and compassion for another take over completely, it is expressed through actions not feelings. You cannot gradually and cautiously feel your way toward a loving action. Genuine love always leaps before it looks. This is exactly the kind of love we celebrate on Mother's Day.

Love in action is the force behind all those meals Mom prepared; all those car pools to soccer games or dance lessons; all those good-night books read to sleepy children by a sleepier mom; all those long walks and long talks – all those other things done by a mom who found ways to work inside and outside the home, giving herself equally to family and community, in order to fulfill the calling of motherhood.

Jesus' new commandment to his disciples was precisely this: Show your love. Love one another. By your love they will know more about you than by anything else you could do. Love each other as I have loved you. Jesus didn't love us simply by feeling loving toward us. Jesus lived a life that embodied love. He healed the sick. He fed the hungry. He comforted the confused. He taught the ignorant. He hugged little children. Jesus' love was so great that he suffered torture, went to the cross, and died to demonstrate his action-packed love.

The love Jesus wants his disciples to enter into, not just to feel, is action-packed. And love in action is sometimes embodied by the simplest of compassionate responses. My friend, Houston Hodges, who is now part of the church triumphant, tells of a simple compassionate response of love, which he calls the "Presbyterian Miracle." Houston wrote, "Following her death, he came to the early service to change the pattern he and Nancy had established of attending at eleven. He thought there'd be people there he knew to sit with, but he misjudged and came fifteen minutes early. He sat alone in the center of a pew, two empty pews behind him and three in front, a brave, sad, solitary man. But then the 'miracle' happened. Bob and Nita Garrett slid out of their pew, six rows behind, and quietly moved down the aisle to slip in beside him. Two Presbyterians had left their pew to move

down closer to the front." A true miracle! A simple gesture, to be sure, but one that spoke volumes about love in action.

It is significant that Jesus chose to teach the disciples about love when they gathered for a meal. In many of our families, some of our most important discussions occur around the dinner table, after the meal has been eaten and we are relaxing. During this time of "table talk," goals are clarified, needs are expressed, and encouragement is given. Our "table talk" time is when we are most receptive and responsive. It is, as educators would say, our most teachable moment.

The meal they had shared was special - it was their last. But it was also ordinary. This in itself is instructive. Love is not just to be spoken of from pulpits or in bedtime prayers. Love is to be spoken at all times. Love is not just a feeling. Love is action. Love is not just for special occasions, like Mother's Day. Love is for all occasions. Love is the subject of the most important "table talk" we need to have every day. It is the subject and the object of our faith.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**The Charge: Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God will equip you. God will accomplish a purpose in your being there. Christ who dwells within you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in God's grace, love and power. Amen**