

Sunday May 11th, 2025
Mother's Day

Titus 2:1-5
"Is Mothering Learned?"

Isn't it surprising how a simple thing can take on a life of its own? This happened recently to me simply because I told a little joke and shared a story about my mother. It happened on Saturday March 5th, 2016 when Donway Baptist church hosted a town hall meeting sponsored by our MP Ms. Yasmin Ratansi to celebrate International Women's Day. I was asked to welcome everyone and share a reflection on a woman who made a difference in my life.

I began my remarks with the story of the minister who got up in front of his congregation one morning and said to them. "I want to tell you that some of the best moments in my life have been spent in the arms of another man's wife." As you can imagine, there was an audible gasp from the congregation, and the minister paused for some dramatic effect and then proceeded to say. "I also want you to know that I call her mom."

I then went on to make the point that much of how we think about gender issues reflects the influence of our mothers. Fathers as well, but I was reflecting on women's issues that day. I thought that was the end of it, until a few weeks later there appeared at the church a heavy envelop, with a padded portfolio, embossed with the parliament of Canada logo, which contained a printed notice. A report.

It seems, Ms. Ratansi rose in the house of commons on March 10, and said in part about the town hall meeting, "I would like to thank Rev. Darrell Maguire for reminding us that it is women, our mothers, who nurture society. His example of his mother, and the influence she had on his life was uplifting. It is important to recognize the achievements of women and know there is still so much to be done to promote gender equality in Canada and across the world."

What I said that day about my mother, and society in general, still holds true, and is especially poignant being that today is Mother's Day. Perhaps it was the recognition of how important mothers are that motivated Anna Jarvis. In 1905 Anna's mother passed away, and the grief of that loss was unbearable for her. On the anniversary of her mother's death, on the second Sunday in May, Anna invited some friends over and announced that she had an idea for a nationwide celebration to be called Mother's Day.

Anna's first step in her plan was to write to the Methodist church in Grafton Virginia, where her mother attended for many years. She suggested that the church holds a special service in which mothers receive special recognition. And so, on May 10th, 1908, the very first Mother's Day service was held in Grafton Virginia. The minister spoke on John 19:26-27, "Then Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home."

Miss Jarvis also presented each mother with a carnation, her mother's favourite flower. Miss Jarvis had a vision of a national celebration, and so she took to writing letters to congress, and mayors, and ministers throughout the country. Then finally, Woodrow Wilson in 1914 declared the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day.

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We Canadians simply adopted the celebration to be in line with our American neighbours. The story does go on, however. Anna Jarvis became very unhappy with the commercialization of Mother's Day. She launched numerous lawsuits against companies that sought to profit from the holiday. All these lawsuits failed, and she went bankrupt, and ended up on public assistance. In 1948, Anna Jarvis died, poor, childless, and very unhappy.

I always feel sad when I think of Anna Jarvis. She clearly adored her mother, and as a legacy sought to have all mothers honoured as she tried to honour her mother. The greeting card businesses, florists, and restaurants, even though they were sued, owe Anna Jarvis a great debt. Without her tireless efforts to bring about Mother's Day, their bottom lines would be a lot leaner.

I know Anna Jarvis sacrificed a lot to bring about this day, but I suspect that few among us would suggest we do away with this special day. Those of us who have our mothers still with us recognize how blessed we are. And those of us whose mothers have gone to God would love nothing better than to give their moms one more carnation and take them to their favourite restaurant. But being a mother is not for the faint of heart.

Norman Bales in talking about family ministry writes, "The mom ministry is one of the toughest assignments God gives anybody. She's got to be as insightful as a psychologist, tough as a marine corps drill instructor, gentle as a nurse. She's got to be a labor and management negotiator, a teacher, an electrician, a plumber, and a carpenter. It requires an endless supply of energy, a massive amount of patience, an iron will and a recognition of the fact that if she gets sick, she's got to get well before the end of the school day."

However, there is an unsettling trend of late in our society, that seems to belittle the role of motherhood, and parenting in general. What frightens me even more is this belittling of parenting is leading to a whole host of social problems. Remember on April 25th, 2016, at 1am, the story of a toddler in Toronto who was discovered by a neighbour outside their home crying for his mother. It seems that the father was at work, and the mother decided to leave her three-year-old for an hour and a half because she wanted a pizza.

We have all heard horror stories of parents abandoning children in parked cars, while they head into the casino to gamble for hours, leaving their child unattended.

I do not think for a moment; this denigration of parenting is all about the old debate of career verses family. Frankly, many people now grow up with both parents working, mostly out of necessity. Have you seen how expensive it is to buy and maintain a home? That was the case in my family growing up. My mom and dad both worked. I think the problem is growing narcissism in our society in which even the needs of our own children are sacrificed for our own personal gratification, whether it is pizza or something else.

What bothers me is the idea that our time and effort to parent our children are somehow of a secondary value to lesser things. It is high time we restored in society's mind and heart, the high value of godly parenting. The stakes are very high. This is what I was trying to communicate in my words at the town hall meeting. The person I became, and we all become, is greatly influenced by our time in the arms of another man's wife, our mothers.

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Good mothers are always prepared to set aside their own wants for the betterment of their children. It is critical to the health of our society that we have great mothers and fathers. Men and women who will guide into maturity our future leaders. If this is a goal, we all believe is important, then we need to pay attention to our scripture lesson today from Titus. In a nutshell, Paul is telling Titus that good mothering, and I will extend that to say good fathering as well, does not come out of a vacuum. Good parenting does not come naturally, like breathing.

Some aspects are natural to us. We find it easy, in most cases, to love our children. But ask any teacher about what they see in the classroom, and what they know about the home life of their students, and you learn very quickly that all is not right.

Not always, but surely many of the adults we know, or hear about, whose lives are really messed up, got that way, at least partially, by what they experienced at home. Now here is the shocking bit of news from Titus. I am glad you are sitting down for this. Some of the dysfunction found in families is not the parents' fault. There, I said it. Well, Paul said it. Did you see verse 4? "These older women must train younger women."

What are they to train them to do? "Love their husbands and children, to live wisely, and be pure, to take care of their homes, to do good, and to be submissive to their husbands." Training moms and dads is therefore a community thing. It is not about meddling in other people's affairs, but it is also certainly not about taking a hands-off approach. There is a saying that it takes a village to raise a child, well Paul is saying it takes a church to raise a family.

Paul saw the church as a living organism. The people in the church are all connected, all working together for the health of the whole. In 1 Corinthians 12 he talks about how when one of us suffers we all suffer, and when one of us rejoice, we all rejoice. In a profound way there is no such thing as "minding your own business" in a church family. How we manage our lives, our homes, our business dealings: are relevant to the faith community.

If you want to live a life of anonymity, then do not join a church. There is, of course, a difference from being a busybody, and lovingly intervening in someone's life to make a difference. If Paul had had the word available to him, he might have used the word mentoring. Paul says that older women are to set an example, an example of a godly life. Older women are to help younger women to become godly in their own walk with Christ.

Implied here is that right living, and right teaching go hand in hand. Now one thing that someone might want to raise is the question of what constitutes an older woman. I don't think it has anything to do with the chronological age. It is more about our attitude, and our life experience. Maybe the phrase "she is an old soul" fits here. Surely Paul means women who have experienced a bit more of life than others.

Maybe he means women whose children are grown and no longer need their mother's full attention. Older women are surely those who can honestly say, "been there, done that". One sure fire way to know if you are an older woman, is if you see younger women, especially mothers taking a certain course of action and you say, "Tsk, tsk. In my day we wouldn't have done things that way!"

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Again, notice I didn't say that makes you an old woman, but rather older than the younger woman. In a healthy church environment, older women, and men, can mentor younger adults. We can empathize with their struggles. We can offer guidance when it is asked of us. We can carefully, and lovingly, intervene when we see someone heading down a treacherous path in life. It is not that we are know-it-alls, but we do know some things.

As a church, we are incarnating the body of Christ. Our collective God given wisdom is exponentially far greater than any wisdom we possess on our own. The overall goal is that of a ministry of love. We work together to learn to love each other and enhance the love in our homes. Yes, many of us could say something about how to love our spouses.

Yes, many of us could talk about how to love our children. We are not talking about mushy feelings here, but biblical agape love. Elisa Morgan and Carol Kuykendall in their book *What Every Child Needs*, speaks of the nine basic needs of a child expressed in the language of love.

1. Security: a hold me close love.
2. Affirmation: a crazy about me love.
3. Belonging: a fit me into the family love.
4. Discipline: a give me limits love.
5. Guidance: a show me and tell me love.
6. Respect: a let me be love.
7. Play: a play with me love.
8. Independence: a let me grow up love.
9. Hope: a give me hope love.

All children need to experience these nine loves, and the primary source of these expressions of love need to come from mothers and fathers. We have got to stop assessing the success of any family by how much money they have, or the house they live in, or the car they drive, but rather by the quality and depth of love within the home. The greatest achievement of any family is that we love one another.

"Being a mother is" as Paul Ware states, "a soul craft. Moms are partners with God in crafting a child into an adult that is trained and ready to serve him." Consider the life and ministry of Paul's protégé Timothy. Timothy had been prepared by this soul craft. Paul writes, "I know that you sincerely trust the Lord, for you have the faith of your mother, Eunice, and your grandmother, Lois." (2 Tim. 1:5)

Time and time again, the bible tells us that nothing is more important than love. Love of God and love for each other. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13 that if we did amazing, sacrificial things, but we do not have love, we are nothing. Please do not let anyone ever tell you that making a priority to love your family is frivolous, or a waste of your time and resources. Don't let the world's ideas of what makes a person successful, make you think any less of your role as a mother or father.

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We should wear our title as mothers and fathers not with pride, but with an acknowledgement that it is a calling from God.

There was a mother who had to fill out some forms at the county clerk's office. She was asked what her job was. She replied, "I am a mother." She was told that being a mother was not an acceptable job title. So, in the place where it asks for occupation, she wrote...

I'm...a research associate in the field of child development and human relations...I have a continuing program of research (what mother doesn't) in the laboratory and in the field (indoors and out). I am working for my Master's (for a whole family) and already have four credits (all daughters). Of course, the job is one of the most demanding in the humanities and I often work 14 hours a day (24 is more like it). But the job is more challenging than most run of the mill careers and the rewards are in satisfaction rather than just money.

If we want a strong society and well-adjusted future leaders, then we need to do all we can to mentor and support the young mothers and fathers in our midst. This is a church's calling and church's responsibility. Can mothering be learned? Absolutely! And every time we are together as a church family we can honestly say, "School is in session."