



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“Here Is Your Mother”

Scripture Lessons: *Exodus 2:1-10; John 19:17-27*

*This sermon was preached by The Rev. Dr. L. Holton Siegling Jr.
on May 14, 2023, at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church
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Exodus 2:1-10

Birth and Youth of Moses

¹ Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. ²The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. ⁴When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. ⁴His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

⁵The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. ⁶When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children,” she said. ⁷Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?” ⁸Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Yes.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. ⁹Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.” So, the woman took the child and nursed it. ¹⁰When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses,^b “because,” she said, “I drew him out^c of the water.”

John 19:17-27

The Crucifixion of Jesus

So they took Jesus; ¹⁷and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew ¹ is called Golgatha. ¹⁸There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. ¹⁹Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth,^a the King of the Jews.” ²⁰Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew,^b in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” ²² Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.” ²³When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. ²⁴So they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.” This was to fulfill what the scripture says,

“They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing, they cast lots.”

And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple who he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." ²⁷Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

Here Is Your Mother

Here's a little bit of Mother's Day trivia:

Anna Jarvis – the woman to whom our official observance of Mother's Day is most attributed – she, herself, wasn't a mother, at least not in a biological sense.

And isn't that interesting ... that this day of days – which is so widely recognized as an occasion to honor our mothers – that it was begun some 115 years ago by a woman ... not with a child in her womb, but rather with an appreciation for her mother in her heart!

Now, I say, that by no means, to diminish motherhood in a traditional sense / and it is certainly not intended to gloss over the incredible joy ... or maybe even the pain that we associate with our mothers, which is to say nothing of someone's personal experience of motherhood ...

No! The reason I bring that up is because, while we all have one – a mother that is – I can't help but wonder about the extent to which we may have more than one.

I mean, what is it that makes a mother, anyway? Biology? Yes! Absolutely! ... But is there not more to it than that?

Are there not countless women out there in the world today who may not have actually birthed a child, but who have been mothers nonetheless?

I'm thinking about all those remarkable women who may not have had children of their own, but who have, in fact, mothered other children and have done so with a profound measure of love and care.

I've shared with some of you the experience I had with a black friend and colleague. One day I moderated a Session meeting for him, and at one point in the meeting, he looked across the room at one of the Elders – a woman who was not his mother, mind you – and he referred to her as "mother."

It happened that he used that title several times and to several different women ... and it became clear to me, that, in that context, those esteemed women were not just viewed as leaders/as Elders ... they were perceived as mothers.

I dare say, when it comes to our faith, and, in fact, the Biblical witness, there are any number of occasions wherein a woman – or a man, for that matter – become either a mother or a father, not because of genetics, but because of grace!

Take this morning's Old Testament lesson for example. There the baby Moses was ... floating down the river in his basket of reeds.

I can't help but wonder if Pharaoh's daughter, while she was having a conversation with her maids ... if she heard from a distance the faint sound of a baby's cry? ... Somehow, providentially, she was drawn to that small floating basket.

Ultimately, we know that she was compelled to draw Moses from the water ... and while it was God's plan that day to ensure the safety of a deliverer for his people, it was also God's plan that an Egyptian princess would become the mother of a child that she did not bear.

Or consider the story of Ruth. She is the one whose husband had died, and who could have easily stayed in her own land and with her own people; but instead, chose to be much more like a daughter to her mother-in-law ... choosing to go with Naomi back to her land and to her people ...

"Where you go, I will go;" Ruth famously says, "where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God."

... And if we fail to understand their bond as that which typically exists between a mother and a daughter, then let us listen again to what the women of the town say when celebrating the birth of Ruth's long-awaited son: "For your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has born him."

Or think about the story of Hannah, that blessed woman who promised God that if He granted her a son that she would dedicate him to God's service.

And so, when Samuel was born and after she had weened him, she fulfilled her end of the bargain, making an incredible sacrifice! She gave Samuel to Eli, the priest, and, from that moment on, we are told that Eli became like a father to Samuel.

... And then there's Queen Esther! We often forget that she was an orphan. The Bible tells us that, Mordecai, I believe was Esther's cousin. He had brought her up because she had neither a father nor a mother ..."

The Bible puts it like this ... "When her father and her mother died, Mordecai adopted her as his own daughter."

Friends, I share these stories to demonstrate how it is that these people and others, who are major characters within God's story of salvation, people who were used mightily for God's good purposes – they were also mothers and fathers ... but they were not mothers and fathers to begin with.

On the occasion when his own mother and brothers were standing outside and wanted to see him, Jesus responded in such a way that we might be left to think that he was being harsh or that maybe he was somehow neglecting his mother by not immediately going outside.

But if that is what we think, then we have all but forgotten that Jesus was the very fulfillment of the law and the prophets, and he wasn't about to neglect the honor that was due his mother!

We would do well to remember that Jesus responded to the announcement that his mother and brothers were outside saying this: "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And pointing to his disciples, he 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."

In saying this, Jesus was making it abundantly clear that that which is of fundamental importance – is doing God's will, and that has mothering to do with an earthly lineage!

Ah, at the end of the day, whether we started out as mothers or fathers or brothers or sisters ... we are now! ... And isn't it just like God to take something so seemingly ordinary – like the model of a family/ basic human relationships – and to enliven them with his grace?

At our staff meeting this past Monday we had a brief devotion on this morning's New Testament lesson ... and it was brought up that the whole of Jesus' life is sort of bookended by this phenomenon.

At the beginning of his life, we know Joseph to be Jesus' father! And the fact that Joseph had no relations with Mary prior to Jesus' conception ... the fact that Joseph was not Jesus' biological father ... that did not mean for a moment that he was not Jesus' father in every good and worthy sense of the word.

What's more, that lack of a direct ancestry ... that did not affect, one iota, the fulfillment of the divine prophecy that said that the Savior of the world would emerge from the line and lineage of King David. ... and who exactly is said to be of the House of David?

The Gospel according to Luke puts it like this: "Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David."

That's the beginning of Jesus' life ... what about the end? Well, when we turn our attention to this morning's New Testament lesson ... we see this phenomenon play itself out, yet again.

"Meanwhile," the Bible says, "standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's

sister, Mary, the wife of Ciopas, and Mary Magdalene.

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, here is your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.”

The miracle is that while John was not Mary’s son ... and while Mary was not John’s mother, ah, from that hour on ... things were different!

This is part of what it means to talk about Jesus being the firstborn within a large family ... it means to understand ourselves in relationship with one another not just in familial terms, but in familial ways!

If, for example, we choose this day to make a gift to the Mother’s Day offering, we are supporting mothers and fathers in our Presbyterian Communities who may not be our own ... but who are!

And when we celebrate Abigail’s baptism and pray for the students in the Confirmation Class, we are making promises to guide and nurture children of God who are not our own ... oh ... and yet they are!

In these ways and countless others, we are together, heirs of the gracious gift of life / members of the Body of Christ.

And be we in a 209-year-old sanctuary or tuning in from a home that has been newly built ... whenever we are found – there the church is found. And wherever the church is found, there are our brothers and sisters and fathers and mothers!

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

*The above sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website.