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Date: May 12, 2019
Sermon Title: "A Mother's Job Description"
Pastor: Rev. David Johnson Rowe
Scripture: John 19:25-27

John 19:25-27

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. 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.

We've just finished the Easter season, the 40 days of Lent, the build-up of Holy Week, the emotional roller coaster of Palm Sunday happiness, Maundy Thursday Last Supper, and betrayal, Good Friday's Crucifixion, and Easter's almost unfathomable joy. In truth, Holy Week and Mother's Day are both bittersweet, joy tinged with sorrow, sorrow tinged with joy.

On Mother's Day, everyone in Church is filled with memories. For those whose mothers are living, the memories are fresh, are current, and more are just around the corner. For those whose mothers have passed, those memories may be just as fresh, but there is a tear in our eyes, a catch in our throats, a hesitation in our words.

For all of us, young, younger, old and older, there are all the great women of our lives—mothers, yes, grandmothers, aunts, sisters, teachers, coaches, wives, best friends, coworkers, godmothers, foster moms, adoptive moms. Women who were there for us at just the right time in just the right way, many of them long ago, many of them long gone. But the memories are strong.

I did a little test myself this week. I played baseball from age 6 to 20, often two or three different teams each year. I could remember the names of only three of my coaches. Then I tried to remember the names of my teachers, kindergarten

on through postdoctoral studies, and I remembered every single woman teacher. I can't begin to explain the power of gender and gender roles, even as it is all changing. And on Father's Day we'll celebrate the influence of fathers and men in our lives.

But today I'm simply attesting to a simple truth: there are women in our lives whose impact is beyond measure and often beyond words. It is said that every Mother's Day sermon is about the pastor's mother, and that's probably true. It's equally true that in 50 years of Mother's Day sermons, I have not adequately described her. But we all try, don't we? With cards, words, balloons, gifts, surprises? We try our best.

Our Scripture shows Jesus's ultimate effort to honor his mom, Mary. It is a poignant, even awful scene. Jesus is hanging on the Cross, his life torturously ebbing from his body right before his mother's eyes. Look at any of the great Crucifixion paintings. Mary is always there, at the foot of the Cross, regal yet stricken with grief, barely able to stand, supported by John, one of the Disciples.

And in almost his final breath, Jesus turns the care of his mother over to John, nodding from one to the other. "Mother, behold your son," nodding at John. "John, behold your mother," nodding toward Mary. "Take care of each other," Jesus was saying, "be mother and son." "You are each other's keeper." Despite the awfulness of the moment, Jesus was offering a brief experience of beauty: a child's love for his mother, even as an adult child; and a mother's love for her child. And at the same time, Jesus expands that love beyond the boundaries of family or blood. Mary is given an extra son. John is given an extra mother. And all the responsibilities that go with it.

I was thinking about those responsibilities this week. I'm on the search committee for the new executive director of a major local charity, and the first order of business was to review, update, even change the "job description." Since we're all multitaskers nowadays, you can imagine me sitting in a large boardroom focused on finding a new executive director while at the same time thinking about my Mother's Day sermon. I start imagining a job description for a mother. I realized quite suddenly that what we were really looking for in a new executive director is actually a good mother!

Listen to the job description: "Responsible for the leadership and management and sound financial basics and to serve all who come through the door. Maintain good working relationships with everyone. Be able to address conflict, show integrity, think outside the box, maximize our space. Direct, supervise, and delegate. Enable others to grow. Keep everyone informed. Attend to the spiritual, physical, and mental needs of everyone. Ensure all obligations are met. Partici-

pate in all projects. Be excellent in oral communication and judgment. Provide quality service and a sound operation for everyone.” In other words, a mother.

Now, before I go too far out on a limb, let me assure you I am fully aware that society and roles and expectations and who does what—that’s all changing, and thank goodness! Truth is, even the Bible is not as one-dimensional about gender as we sometimes think. Jesus even described himself in the Bible as like a mother hen caring for her chicks. God is described as “Sofia,” female, wisdom. The bottom line is that God is as multifaceted as the job description I just shared with you, which is as multifaceted as the Bible’s definition of the ideal woman.

When you get home today, read Proverbs, Chapter 31, the last half. There are 15 verses there that describe a most extraordinary human being, a person of enormous gifts and varied interests that touch upon every aspect of life, and it was written 3,000 years ago about a woman in the Middle East. It begins with a rhetorical question: “Who can find a good woman? She is far more precious than jewels.”

But then, verse by verse, we are given the job description of those people in our lives whose mothering qualities, mothering efforts, mothering abilities, mothering instincts, mothering interests, mothering, period, have shaped our lives. Even saved our lives. Listen to this mothering job description from Proverbs:

She does good and not harm all the days of her life.

She considers opportunities, buys resources, invests wisely.

She works vigorously.

She knows that her work is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night.

She opens her arms to the poor and reaches out to the needy.

She prepares her family well for winter.

She supplies her family and supplies her community and supplies the marketplace.

She is clothed with the strength and dignity.

She speaks with wisdom and teaches kindness and never eats of the bread of idleness.

Honor her for all that she has done, and let her works be praised at the city gate.

Why the “city gate”? Because that’s the center of activity, that’s the seat of power, that’s where everything happens. She’s that important.

Hollywood has even been applauded for finally having a true female superhero, “Wonder Woman.” The Bible knew of such women 3,000 years ago. You and I have known it all our lives. Some of us grew up with one. Some of us are married to one. Some of you are one.

May I close with a tough ending? We've had two mass school shootings, exactly one week apart: this week in Colorado, last week at the University of North Carolina in Charlotte. In each instance, one of the young students killed ran toward the shooter, courageously sacrificing himself for others. Riley Howell at his college and Kendrick Castillo at his high school. What shall we call them? That's the spirit of a hero. That's the spirit of a "first responder." That's the spirit of a mother . . . gender and age notwithstanding.

And if you're willing to go with me a step further to think outside the box, to stretch yourself theologically, spiritually, well, that's the spirit of Jesus Christ. On the Cross, in his final hour, Jesus honors his mother, caring for her, looking out for her with his last breath. And then Jesus does what mothers always do, giving themselves up for others, making the biggest sacrifice, putting others first.

Well, we've come full circle. From Jesus's love of his mother on the Cross to Jesus's own "mothering" of us; from the job description of a top-flight CEO to the job description of a great woman; from the mothering example of the great women in our lives to the mothering example of not even mothers; from the mothering that we have been given to the mothering we can give.

A blessed Mother's Day to all of us.

Let's stand and sing together the beautiful Hymn No. 56, "For the Beauty of the Earth"

*For the beauty of the earth,
for the beauty of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies,
Lord of all, to thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.*

*For the beauty of each hour
of the day and of the night,
hill and vale, and tree and flower,
sun and moon, and stars of light,
Lord of all, to thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise*

*For the joy of ear and eye,
for the heart and mind's delight,
for the mystic harmony
linking sense to sound and sight,*

*Lord of all, to thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.*

*For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,
friends on earth, and friends above,
for all gentle thoughts and mild,
Lord of all, to thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.*

*For thy church that evermore
lifteth holy hands above,
offering up on every shore
one pure sacrifice of love,
Lord of all, to thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.*