

Denice K. Leslie
May 13, 2007
Mother's Day
John 14; 23-29
Proverbs 4:10 – 14
“A Mother's Legacy”

Paul Reiser points out: “Babies have to put up with some pretty disgusting practices themselves. I saw a kid who had some dried-up food on his face. (Not since birth, just since lunch, I imagine.) His mother took out a tissue, spat on the tissue and rubbed it into the kid's face. I'm not making this up.

This goes on, in communities around our country, on a daily basis. It's enough to break your heart. You know that if babies could talk, that'd be the first thing they'd bring up. “Hey, don't do that. It's revolting. Would you like it if someone did that to you? Okay, then.”

It is disgusting, but it sure does work, doesn't it? There's something in Mother Saliva that cleans like nobody's business. All women, once they give birth, their enzymes change, and saliva becomes Ajax. It'll clean anything: a baby's face, a countertop, a Buick -- you get enough mothers; you could do a whole car in 30, 40 minutes. And the best part is, it doesn't even have to be your mother. I go up to total strangers: “Miss, do you have kids? You do? Could you spit on this? I can't get it out.”¹

One more:

A story is told of a little girl who was asked to write an essay on “birth” She went home and asked her mother how she had been born. Her mother, who was busy at the time, said, “The stork brought you darling, and left you on the doorstep.”

Continuing her research she asked her dad how he'd been born. Being in the middle of something, her father similarly deflected the question by saying, “I was found at the bottom of the garden. The fairies brought me.” □□Then the girl went and asked her grandmother how she had arrived. “I was picked from a gooseberry bush,” said Grandma. □□Armed with this information the girl wrote her essay. When the teacher asked her later to read it in front of the class, she stood up and began, “There

¹ Homiletics illustrations --Paul Reiser, Couplehood (New York: Bantam Books, 1994), 330.

has not been a natural birth in our family for three generations ...”²

Yes! Today is Mother's Day! Mother's Day is a holiday celebrating motherhood and is a day to honor and thank our mothers. It's always held on the second Sunday of May. Mothers often receive gifts on this day. The traditional flowers for Mother's Day are the rose or carnation although it seems to me Mother's Day was always a great day for orchids.

As we are now in the fourth year of the War in Iraq, it seems very appropriate to recall the original purpose of Mother's Day. Here is a little history:

“Mother's Day was first proclaimed around 1870 by Julia Ward-Howe's Mother's Day Proclamation. She called for it to be observed each year nationally in 1872. As originally envisioned, Howe's Mother's Day was a call for pacifism and disarmament by women.

This is Julia's Proclamation:

Mother's Day Proclamation

Arise then ... women of this day!

Arise, all women who have hearts!

Whether your baptism be of water or of tears!

Say firmly:

“We will not have questions answered by irrelevant agencies,

Our husbands will not come to us, reeking with carnage,

For caresses and applause.

Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn

All that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy, and patience.

We, the women of one country,

Will be too tender of those of another country

To allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs.”

From the voice of the devastated Earth a voice goes up with

Our own. It says: “Disarm! Disarm!

The sword of murder is not the balance of justice.”

² Homiletics Illustrations.

Blood does not wipe our dishonor,
Nor violence indicate possession.
As men have often forsaken the plough and the anvil
At the summons of war,
Let women now leave all that may be left of home
For a great and earnest day of counsel.
Let them meet first, as women, to bewail and
commemorate the dead,
Let them solemnly take counsel with each other as to
the means whereby the great human family can live
in peace.”³

And so early Mother Day observances were “mostly marked by women’s peace groups. A common early activity was the meeting of groups of mother’s whose sons had fought or died on opposite sides of the American Civil War. The first known national observance occurred on May 13 in 1877 in Ablion at a Methodist Episcopal Church which began to set aside the Second Sunday in May to recognize the special contributions of mothers. The Methodists continued to push for a national recognition of the Day and it was finally made official by President Woodrow Wilson on May 14, 1914. It has since become a day to generally recognize mothers.

But the legacy of that first Mother’s Day Proclamation certainly echoes the hearts of anyone who has born or nurtured a child. The miracle of participating in the process of creating another human being is at once both humbling and fiercely empowering—calling out a desire to protect and nurture all that is fragile and dependent and awakening in us the beauty and wonder of all living things. Connecting us to the heart of our Creator in a way no other experience has, at least in my own experience.

This is not to say that all mothers are nurturing or even want to be mothers. God knows there are no perfect mothers, just as there are no perfect fathers, children or families.

It is simply to say that given the ability to procreate also holds within it the potential for us to reverence life and care deeply about the state of the world into which our children arrive, grow and eventually leave us.

It is also the opportunity for each of us as mothers to pass on a legacy of love for our children. Like the legacy of wisdom we hear in the words to children recorded in Proverbs 4 which begins, “Hear my child and accept my words that the years of your life may be many.” The needs of each generation for instruction, for wisdom, for guidance and love is the same.

The legacy of a mother is born not only of a motherly tenderness, but more often than not, from the pain of our own hard won experience distilled into a legacy of wisdom we wish ardently we could pass on to our children and in so doing spare them some of the hard lessons of life we have learned.

I have a letter given to me by Jennifer Hall. It was written by her mother at the New Year in 2006. Jennifer lost her mother this year in a fatal automobile accident. Fortunately, her mother took the time to write each of her children a letter as she recognized in her passing years that one day in the not too distant future, her time would come. This is Jennifer’s mother’s legacy to her. It is a testament to her great love for her children and her abiding faith in God. It is her guiding wisdom. And it echoes Proverbs. Listen:

Her mother writes: “I thank God for another year for me and my family. Jennifer, time isn’t as long as it has been, my time is drawing near. I think of it every day while I am working and in my nights.

We all have to take this trip, ready or not. We all have to get ready for this great day.

As a mother I thought I’d better tell you I love you and your family very much. We both made some very bad choices that will stay with us a long time.

All of this can be put behind us if we can find it in our hearts to forgive each other.

Holding on to old hurts just makes us sick. I forgive you for leaving us when we needed you most. Don’t feel bad your sister and brother don’t know you. They came after you were gone.

Please forgive me for not being a mother you could be proud of. Don’t make the same mistakes I did. Or is it too late for me to say?

All I can say is to give it to Jesus. Let him give us rest and healing in our hearts, soul and body. There is no other way we can be happy. Please turn to him before it is too late. It’s free!

³ Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

God loves you and yours. I love you too. Nothing could ever change that. Thanks for being a strong Black woman.

I think your son will someday wake up and see the pain, and the hurt he let you go through. Pray that God will show him the true way.

Money isn't the highway to heaven. Love is. It's in your bible.

Stop trusting in man. God has what you need; everything good comes from him.....trust God first – he will meet your needs if you believe. Love, Your Mom.”

Can't you just feel Jennifer's mother's presence in this letter? Reading it just brings her to life! Scripture is like that.

In today's gospel reading Jesus' words sound lot like this letter penned by a caring mother as he seeks to reassure and instill in his disciples the words that lead to life. Spoken on the eve before his death, Jesus is leaving his legacy of love and promise as he departs.

His promise is that although they can't go where he is going—he will not leave them desolate. Like a mother reassuring small children that although she has to part from them, they will not be without her loving presence for long.

This is because, as Jesus informs and assures us, the “Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send”will come “and will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.”

It is his promised presence released in his Spirit to be an active and abiding presence in our lives that gives rise to his next gift: his peace.

Jennifer finds great comfort and peace in the penned words her mother so thoughtfully and lovingly left behind. In the same way, we read and hear Jesus' words of love and promise—but even more so we have his Holy Spirit at work among us—we are not bereft of his presence.

Here is comfort—indeed here is peace—not the kind that suppresses conflict, but which, even in the midst of it, will not have power over us because we have within us a greater reality. The active, creative, advocating presence of Christ at work in us through his Spirit.

Here is strength for living; Here is the kind of power and presence that could impassion a woman like Julia Ward-Howe to call all mothers to the cause of disarmament.

The kind of active, creative presence and power that could call the obscure and insignificant life of a small young polish woman to go to India and minister to the homeless outcasts on the streets of Calcutta: Mother Theresa.

The kind of power and presence that faithful mothers rely on each and every day to give them the strength they need to rise, get children up and off to school, put in a full day's work, come home, make dinner, do house work, attend to the children and begin the cycle again the next day and the next, and the next.

The kind of active, caring, patient, fore bearing love that continues to care, pray for and forgive even wayward children whether their children return that love or not.

Like God. Yes. The word for God on the lips of little children is, indeed, mother.

Let the people say, Amen.