Knox Presbyterian Church, Manotick May 12, 2024

Proverbs 31: 10-31, 2 Timothy 1: 3-7

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**“Honouring Mother and being Hopeful”**

There are moments when you look up into the blue sky and see a cumulus cloud slowing moving and changing, you know the cotton-like clouds, that kind of look like white broccoli, if there were such a thing, moving, changing and awe invoking, with the birds flying past and the sun on your face and feet, then you worship. You thank God for the beautiful order He brings uniquely to this planet and allows us to live. You marvel and are grateful. I hope you have those moments outside. Often we are too busy to stop and marvel. Smell the roses, when their time comes.

Today we stop and simply give thanks to God for mothers. We wonder and marvel at the co-creation that happens to bring human beings into this world: mother’s and father’s love ideally the context for God bringing you and me into existence. It is amazing and it is good we have a moment every year to celebrate, or two moments: Mother’s Day and Father’s Day. Nothing can take away from this core reality of who we are as human beings. No other discussion can take away from this vital and core truth. God made us male and female, and it was good. (Gen. 1: 27-31)

**2 Timothy 1: 3-7**

Scripture does have several places where mothers are key in God’s work. The apostle Paul mentions the importance of both Timothy’s grandmother Lois and Timothy’s mother Eunice for Timothy, a key pastor in the early church. The apostle speaks of this mother’s sincere faith and the grandmother’s as well. Do not underestimate your influence on history in your relationship to your children and grandchildren when it comes to the faith. Sometimes we are timid to introduce our grandchildren to Jesus, particularly if our children may not be as interested. But Scripture is clear that what your parents and grandparents share with you makes a difference. Prayer makes a difference. Do not underestimate your role, but share as boldly as you are able, trusting the Lord for the results. Paul makes it clear that these two women were crucial in Timothy’s faith. He uses the term “sincere” in reference to their faith. **Faith** means trusting Jesus with your life and relationships. Make sure you do so right now. **Sincere** comes from the Latin “*sine ceres*,” which means “without wax.” What does that mean?

This brings us back to the time when most cookware and bottles were sold as pottery. You could see clay pots of all shapes and sizes in the marketplace. Some of the time, pots developed cracks or even had little or larger shards break off the top of them. Some merchants would no longer sell them because they were broken. Other merchants would take the shard and seal the crack with wax, which would act like a glue and sell the pot as if it were new and not broken. Sincerity is without wax, which means we can show our cracks, our faults and character defects. Mature faith allows for vulnerable, imperfect trusting. Jesus is sinless. We are not. We are not perfect. These two women who so wonderfully influenced Timothy were not perfect. But they had a real and powerful faith in Jesus. They passed it on.

Paul, who is said to not like women, which I don’t think is a correct statement, clearly endorses this mother’s and grandmother’s faith in a strong and unambiguous way. So today we give thanks to God for those faithful women who have helped so many trust Jesus, whether they are children or grandchildren or others.

**Proverbs 31: 10-31**

It is hard to underestimate the role of mothers in this life. Scripture records an acrostic song, which means that every verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet in 22 verses. For English, A, B, C, D…in Hebrew, *aleph, beth, gimel, daleth…* Even more surprising for those who care about Scriptural authority and authorship is the clear fact that the author of Proverbs is ascribed to Solomon (1:1). Yet Solomon then ascribes chapter 30 to Agur who prays about not being too poor, because of the temptation to steal, and not being too rich, because it may lead to forgetting God; so just give me my daily bread. (30:7-9) Sounds familiar, doesn’t it? Give us this day our daily bread…(Matt 6:11)

And Solomon ascribes chapter 31 to King Lemuel. Scholars don’t know who he is, but Solomon gives him credit for the chapter, and more than that, notes that it is what his mother taught him. The Queen Mother has had great influence in many courts, but here we have teaching for those who might be kings or mothers…and for everyone who listens to God within their particular sphere of influence.

I understand that Prov. 31: 10-31 can become an unrealistic and unfair standard for women who are already multitasking beyond their means. I am hoping we can hear these verses to appreciate the mothers and other women in our lives who direct us to the Lord and to His word.

I commend to you Dr. Bruce Waltke’s commentary on Proverbs, volume 2, pages 501-536 in the New International Commentary on the Old Testament series of Bible commentaries. I had the privilege of being Dr. Waltke’s teaching assistant at Regent College back in the early 1980s. There’s too much content to go through everything this morning, but there is a strong sense throughout the song that when a woman trusts or fears the LORD, that is, reverences God first in her life in both words and deeds, that there is a great power at work in her that touches all of life around her.

In fact, the whole song is much more like praise for “a spiritual heir of Israel’s ancient heroes” and “being a champion for those around her by her diligent application of wisdom.”

In short, “the valiant wife is a heroic figure used by God to do good for His people, just as the ancient judges and kings did good for God’s people by their martial exploits.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

It’s no wonder the model can seem to be too high for anyone to achieve, female or male. She achieves so much. But in the midst of her achievements, is the core value of honouring and trusting God with her many gifts and high level of energy. Reading Proverbs 31 is not meant to make you tired or overwhelmed. It is meant to give praise to God for mothers and others who have done more for you than you could ask or imagine.

So we approach these verses humbly, admiring her first for her relationship to the LORD, then her other relationships, then her accomplishments. Dr. Waltke summarizes them as a kind of eulogy:[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. Introduction: her value (vv. 10-12)
   1. Her general worth inferred from her scarcity (v. 10)
   2. Her worth to her husband (vv. 11-12)
2. Body: her activities (vv. 13-27)
   1. Her cottage industry (vv. 13-18)
   2. Seam (janus: putting both parts together) v. 19
   3. Her social achievements (vv. 20-27)
3. Conclusion: her praise (vv. 28-31)
   1. By her family (vv. 28-29)
   2. By all (vv. 30-31)

The way we look at these verses reminds us that they have been looked at for generations in Israel and in the Church. Dr. Waltke says:

In conclusion, this valiant wife has been canonized as a role model *for all Israel* for all time. Wise daughters aspire to be like her. Wise men seek to marry her. And all wise people aim to incarnate the wisdom she embodies, each in his own sphere of activity.[[3]](#footnote-3)

While saying this, we must appropriately apply what we read to our own context and situation. God is not calling all women to be business owners, with multiple employees, multiple real estate holdings with agricultural holdings such as vineyards and manufacturing textiles from animal or field to final products for national and international sales. Nor does God expect you to go without sleep (v. 18) which often produces many kinds of ill health. Trust and honesty are serious commodities. (vv. 10-12) Providing for those in your household and for the community and the poor and needy are also serious commodities. (vv. 15, 20-21) She has both a clothing line and a home furnishings line (vv. 24 & 22). She certainly would make Martha Stewart blush or some other internationally known star.

The valiant woman’s strength, dignity, wisdom and kindness mark her in wonderful ways. (vv. 25-27) People, even her children and husband, see her life and praise her. This is a high accomplishment. So the acrostic poem ends with questioning attractiveness, charm and beauty, but point soundly to fearing God which does not mean being afraid, but rather accountable to God and worshipping throughout daily life and serving others. That’s what lasts: People and the Word of God. Invest in them. Don’t forget your family in the midst of your business(es). Entrust your family into God’s hands every day.

Well, the power of a mother who follows God should never be questioned. It is our mothers that gave us life. We experienced life first through our mothers, inside her. Psychologists have been teaching on this primal reality for a long time. Our mothers give us a sense of being. Their acceptance of us and nurturing us tell us it is okay to be in this world. Their relationship with us is critical for our sense of being okay in this life. If there is something missing or wrong or abusive in their lives toward us, we can encounter severe difficulties.

Now in this part of the sermon I want you to only think about your relationship with your mother as opposed to your relationship as a mother. Don’t judge or condemn yourself in anyway at this time as a mother, but leave that in God’s hands. Meanwhile, it is true that our mother’s preoccupation with work (at home or away) and our mother’s own sins and character defects can greatly affect us. In fact, the wounds that mothers can inflict (almost always subconsciously) can be great roots of our sinful habits and addictions.

Some of us, men and women, can become paranoid of women, struggling to trust them and feeling betrayed, simply because mom wasn’t there or was there in an unhealthy way. Some of us go the opposite route, and deeply desire feminine touch, which can be sexualized in both men and women. Some of us search for the ‘perfect’ woman, which can lead to inappropriate fantasy and sexual addiction.

Self-rejection, anxiety and restlessness can also come out of these “mother wounds.” And of course, we haven’t even begun to talk about fathers and how they can negatively impact us. But let us again bring our deepest wounds and those parts of ourselves that are the hardest to face before the Lord. He knows. He can re-parent us appropriately. Jesus knows. He can love us through the worst of our difficulties and challenges. His love excels all others.

God knows what we go through on Mother’s Day. Maybe it is only gratitude and praise to God for your mother. Thank Him anew today. Maybe it is some severe issues because of how your mother was there or not there for you growing up. We mostly say our parents did the best they could. They all have both sins and gifts that have impacted us.

And on this day, I want to say if you wanted to be a mother and that has not worked out the way you planned, please hear my consolation and empathy. I think I’ve shared with you that my wife and I have two daughters. They both got married in 2018. One has had four children since then. The other has wanted to have children but has not been able to have them. They have very different experiences of Mother’s Day, as you can imagine.

All this to say: I know Mother’s Day brings up a lot of things, and not necessarily only the beautiful and wonderful things of motherhood. Let us continue to pray for one another and ask for God’s mercy as we go forward in these days, with both gratitude and humility for what God is doing. We can hope anew in Him today. For His love endures forever.

Let us pray.

*Lord, you were rich beyond all splendour, yet, for love’s sake, became so poor; leaving your throne in glad surrender, sapphire paved courts for stable floor. Lord, you were rich beyond all splendour, yet for love’s sake became so poor.*

*Lord, you are love beyond all telling; Saviour and King, we worship you. Emmanuel within us dwelling, make us and keep us pure and true. Lord, you are love beyond all telling, Saviour and King, we worship you.*

*Book of Praise, 1997, #134 “Lord, you were rich” Words by Frank Houghton, revised. French traditional carol: ‘Fragrance.’*

1. Bruce Waltke, The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 15-31, p. 517 citing a student’s paper from Westminster Seminary when he taught there in 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., p. 515 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid., p. 520 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)