



“Not Far From The Tree”
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St. Andrew’s United Methodist Church
San Antonio, Texas
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John 15:1-8

It’s a humbling thing for a pastor to try to preach the word of God to a people who know the faith. It’s a difficult thing at best to try to preach the word of God about mothers and motherhood to those who know it best from those who have only received its benefit. The irony of Mother’s Day is that, I was reading this morning that there’s, do you know that pickles actually have a whole week dedicated to them but mothers only have one day? Pickles! And there are some things that even have a whole month. Grapefruit has a whole month. Did you know that? But mothers only one day!

But motherhood is such a wonderful day. It was actually founded by a woman by the name of Anna Jarvis in 1908. In 1905 Anna’s mother passed away and she loved her mother dearly, so much so that she sought to honor all mothers and motherhood in the best way she knew how and that was in her church. Anna was a Methodist by the way you probably didn’t know that. She was from the Methodist Episcopal Church and so in 1907 it started in the Methodist Episcopal Church in Grafton, West Virginia. I’m reading out of the Book of Worship because it has a little paragraph in here and I thought you might want to know this. The service was organized by Anna Jarvis, a Methodist laywoman to honor her mother who had died on May 9, 1905. By 1908, Anna Jarvis was advocating that all mothers be honored on the second Sunday in May and in 1912 the Methodist Episcopal Church, the forerunner of our denomination, pushed this and recognized the day and raised it to a national agenda. It has some parallels with other more traditional services – English Mothering Sunday in mid lent which focused on returning home and paying homage to one’s mother and with another day called Mother’s Day for Peace which was introduced in 1872 by Julia Ward Howe in Boston as a day to celebrate peace and dedicate to peace.

Mother’s Day! The church actually has another holiday and Jan made reference to it earlier. It’s the Festival of the Christian Home. It’s traditionally celebrated on the second Sunday of May and it’s celebrated to honor families, which are the core cell groups within the Christian faith worldwide. It’s in the family and it’s in the Christian home where Christ is adored. It is in the Christian home where Christ’s messages of love and reconciliation and redemption are taught. It’s in the Christian home where the values of the faith are passed on from generation to generation to generation and so we celebrate this day also, not just because of mothers and motherhood and all that that means which words cannot convey. Hallmark wants you to believe so but words really can’t convey the grace and the dignity and the lovingness that comes from mothers and motherhood. I’m also not foolish enough to believe that everyone had a wonderful mother or everyone was a wonderful mother. Broken homes abound. And maybe that’s why this Festival of the Christian Home is such an important part of it. It’s not a Sunday in which we want to make people feel guilty because you’re not doing what you ought to do but just the opposite of that. It’s to invite folks to know that there is still grace and there is still hope and there is still much love that can abound even yet today.

We were talking the other day about our son, Jan’s and my son, and you mentioned that he is a lot like Tigger bouncing all over hither and yon. I asked my father, I said I don’t think I was ever like that and he said, “Oh yes you were.” I don’t remember that but he said “Oh yes you were.” And Jan and her family have a saying that you know the acorn doesn’t fall far from the tree and there’s a lot of truth in that I suppose.

But that’s exactly what we’re talking about with the faith. It’s not just our identities and our characteristics in the things that we do when we bounce around because we got it from our parents.

It's not just about our hair color or our eye color or whether our ear lobes are attached or detached, it's more than that. It's in the heart and it's in the soul and we are flavored and nurtured and colored and described and given all sorts of character from our parents, from our families, from our homes.

Maybe that's why Jesus gave this analogy of himself being the vine. It wasn't just that he was the vine, he knew who the vine grower was and he allowed the vine grower to tend him, to prune him to enable him to bear much fruit. Because you see that's what vine growers do, they take care of vines. You know we don't have very many around here. I know one family that was trying to grow a vineyard here. One of the things that is interesting about a vineyard is that new vines aren't supposed to bear fruit in the first two to three years and the reason for that is because the fruit would then grow wild and so it is pruned way back early in December and January and for three years it's pruned, not allowed to grow fruit because when the fruit does come you want it to be mature, able to give all the nourishment that it can to the fruit.

We don't talk about the fruit of the vine very much in our modern culture these days. You know even in our agricultural settings we really talk about corn or wheat or those crops that sustain the nation's breadbasket, but in this culture here in John's Gospel we hear Jesus talking about something they were familiar with, the fruit that grows on the vine and the necessity of taking care of it and tending it. Again, I'm not trying to help us to feel somewhat guilty in our parenting or in our family skills but the opportunity is here to know the vinedresser, the vine grower who tends us and prunes us who keeps us growing in the right way and bearing the right fruit. I'm reminded of the wonderful Psalm, Psalm 1 where David writes, "The righteous are like a tree who are planted near streams of living water." When you are grounded in such a way there's no way that anything can affect you. It can't change you. It won't alter who you are because you are nourished from living water. What Jesus is saying here is very similar with the vine. When we're tied intimately into Christ, when we grow from the body of Christ, when we grow from knowing who He is and knowing the vinedresser, we can do no other but bear fruit – good fruit.

The irony of this little story that Jesus is teaching here is you know it is straightforward. It's hard to expound upon it but the truth of the matter is this isn't about us as individuals. This is about us as community, who we are as the church, because if we're not intimately tied to the church to the body of Christ we're not tied to the vine. If we're not tied to the vine, well we're pretty much nothing but firewood, branches to be gathered up and burned. As a community of believers it is imperative for us to remember that the festival of the Christian home is about this home, yes, and about our own homes, too. It's about us being tied together into the life giving and life sustaining branch that is the vine, Jesus Christ. Anytime that we stray from that, we cease to bear fruit. We cease to be all that God created us to be and so we come to this day not just celebrating mothers and motherhood for all that it can be and all that it should be and all that it was created to be but for all that it is and for all that God has blessed it to be.

I have a prayer I would like to close with. It pertains to the Festival of the Christian Home. I would hope that we would turn to God with this in our hearts and pray. "In you, O God, every family on earth receives its name. Illumine the homes of this earth with the light of your love, granting courage to those who are hurt or lonely, endurance to those who care for sick family members and wisdom to those who in fearful times of change need your guidance. We thank you, O God, for gifts of love that we have received from mother, father, spouse, child or companion and as we have been loved by you and by others so may we love. Grant us your peace through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!"

Apart from Christ we can do nothing. Apart from Christ we can do nothing. Let us remain in the vine nourished, pruned, cared for, tended so that we too may be fruitful in Jesus Christ. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen!