

MOTHER LOVE AND THE LOVE OF GOD

PSALM 23

JOHN 10:22-30

A man was boarding an airplane one day. As he came on board, he happened to notice that the head of the plane's cockpit flight crew was a woman. That was no problem. Still, it was a new experience for him.

As he found his seat, he noticed three persons sitting immediately behind him. One was a young boy about six or seven years of age. Next to him was a man in his early thirties. And next to the man was an older woman perhaps in her early sixties.

The man could not help overhearing the conversation among these three persons as the aircraft made final plans for departure from the gate. Very soon he realized that these people were the woman pilot's family. The boy was her son. The man was her husband. And the older woman was her mother. Suddenly he realized why the family was on the plane. This was the first time that woman pilot had been the head of a flight crew! They were there to honor her promotion.

The plane taxied down the runway and poised itself for takeoff. The engines roared to life, and the plane gained speed quickly. Within seconds they were airborne. As the plane began to ascend and bank to the south, the six-year-old boy began to applaud! "Way to go, Mom. Way to go!"

This morning we are applauding our moms. "Way to go!" Truly, today's mom deserves all the support and appreciation she can get. From our text this morning, I suggest that God is like a loving mother and a loving dad as well. Jesus used the analogy of Himself as the Good Shepherd, but he could be speaking of the good parent just as well. He says, "My sheep recognize my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one shall snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, and He is more powerful than anyone else, so no one can kidnap them from me."

On this day when we honor our mothers and celebrate the significance of the Christian family, I'd like to draw some analogies between the love of a parent and the love of God.

FOR ONE THING, THE LOVE OF GOD IS A VERY PERSONAL KIND OF LOVE. "My sheep recognize my name," says Jesus, "and I know them ..."

We live in a lonely world. So much that is counted as love these days is artificial. And sometimes it seems that we don't really count for much. But there is one place where we still are somebody. That is at home. At home we are not simply a number. We are a valued member of the family.

There was an article in the newspapers some time ago about mothers who could recognize their babies just by touching the back of their hands. It's mind-boggling! The study was done with mothers who had been caring for their newborn babies for only one week. After

the week they were asked to feel the backs of the hands of three infants. With 70% accuracy, they were able to pick out their own baby. Seven out of ten of them got it right.

So it is with God. With God we are more than a number – more than a face in the crowd. God loves us with a very personal love. Even the hairs of our head are counted, Jesus said. God could know us by touching the backs of our hands with 100% reliability. That is the first thing to be said from our Scripture. The love of God is a very personal love.

FOR ANOTHER THING, THE LOVE OF GOD IS A VERY GIVING KIND OF LOVE. “My sheep recognize my voice,” says Jesus, “and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish ...” The very nature of God is to give. God gave us life in the first place. God sustains our lives with gifts of sunshine and rain and much more. And best of all, in this life and beyond, God gives us eternal life. Jesus once asked, “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you then who are sinful, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” (Matthew 7:9-11). God is a giving God.

A mother took her six-year-old boy into a doctor’s crowded waiting room. As they waited their turn, the child began to ask his mother all kinds of questions. In half an hour he managed to cover almost every subject known to humanity. To the wonder of all the others sitting in the room, his mother answered each question carefully and patiently. Inevitably, he got around to God. As the other people listened to his relentless “how’s” and “why’s”, it was plain to see by the expressions on their faces that they wondered: “How does she stand it?” But when she answered her son’s next question, she answered theirs too. “Why,” the child asked, “doesn’t God ever get tired and just stop?” After a moment’s thought, she replied, “Because God is love; and His love never gets tired.” The child thought about that; and his questions ceased.

If you or I were God, we would certainly tire of giving, particularly when we get so little gratitude in return.

A pastor was visiting some of his parishioners. He took his young daughter with him. As they visited an elderly couple the man gave her a handful of peanuts. Expecting her to show a spirit of gratitude, the father asked his daughter, ‘Honey, what do you say?’ Sincerely, and with her eyes fixed upon the man, she asked, “You got any more?”

That sounds like many of us. We accept God’s gifts, seldom saying, “thank you” but simply asking, “Have you got any more?” Yet God keeps giving. That is God’s nature.

FOR YOU SEE, GOD’S LOVE NEVER QUILTS. Jesus said, “No one will snatch them from me ...” St. Paul said, “Nothing shall separate us from the love of God ...” and that is good news. God never quits loving. And that’s also true of the love of a faithful parent.

Arnold Prater, in his book entitled, *YOU CAN HAVE JOY*, tells about a man in a little English village named John Deckard. He was a clerk in a textile factory. A modest and quiet man, he lived in an ordinary little house at the edge of town with his wife and his six-year-old

son, Rob. Like thousands of Englishmen, every morning John put on his plain tweed suit, got on his bicycle and rode to work.

Returning home at five in the evening, he would work in his garden until suppertime. Then he would spend a quiet evening with his pipe and his family. A very ordinary English man living what most people would call a very ordinary life.

But Deckard had one claim to fame. For five consecutive years he had won the blue ribbon in the Village Garden Show with his prize rose. It had gone on so long that people had come to expect it. John Deckard's prize rose would win. Everyone else was competing for second place.

Behind his house was his rose garden. When he returned home each evening he would put on his coveralls and spend time out there with his roses. Some said Deckard had more than just "a green thumb". Some said he mothered the roses, that he talked to them and that they understood what he said.

This particular year, John Deckard just knew he would again win the blue ribbon. This year, his rose was truly a rose among roses. Never had he seen such perfection in a flower. This was his masterpiece. As he watched it daily, his contentment and pride grew.

The show was on Saturday and he planned to transplant his rose to a pot early in the morning. But while he was at breakfast, tragedy struck. His little son Rob burst into the kitchen, and chatting excitedly, he rushed to the table and cried, "Look Daddy Look what I have for you!"

And in Rob's grimy little hand, with half its petals gone, its head drooping low, was John Deckard's prize rose.

That afternoon, visitors to the Garden Show were astonished when they came to John Deckard's entry. In his flower pot, he had thrust a stick. And attached to it, at the very top, was a picture of his little son, Rob, who was, indeed, his prize rose. When the judges heard what had happened, they give John Deckard an honorary blue ribbon. Some said that the rose that was not a rose was the finest rose he had ever grown. God's love is like that and we can all be thankful.

So hooray for our moms! They deserve our admiration. But even more, hooray for God, for as a loving parent, God's love is a very personal love. God's nature is a very giving nature. And God's love never quits!

Thanks be to God!

Amen.