“M IS FOR THE MANY THINGS”

John 15:9-17

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“M is for the million things she gave me, O means only that she's growing old, T is for the tears she shed to save me, H is for her heart of purest gold, E is for her eyes with love light shining  
R is right and right she'll always be, put them all together and they spell Mother, A word that means the world to me"

There are lots of wonderful moms here today. Moms who are in traditional families. Non-traditional moms. Single moms. Step moms and Step-in moms. Moms deserve recognition every single day of the year – so it’s the least we can do to set aside this one special day to honor our mom’s each year. But moms - you deserve a whole lot more! You deserve breakfast in bed. Lunch in bed, if you want. A pendant and flowers. Moms deserve a break! So, if I were to write my version of this poem; M is for the mixed feelings I have about Mother's Day because I know that today is not a “happy” day at all, and I know there isn’t a mom among us who feels we’ve filled our human role as mom; as perfectly as the mom in that poem.

Mother's Day is a day when some of us mom’s suspect that the Hallmark card that our off-spring give us, tells us not who we really are in their eyes; but who they’d like us to be. “Happy Mother's Day”, these cards seem to say; “to the mom who keeps the perfect home. To the mom who sets the perfect table and the mom who raises perfect children.”

A recent TV survey on Good Morning America, asked viewers to list their three top television moms of the last several decades. The gold medal went to Claire Huxtable of The Cosby Show. Silver went to Marian Cunningham from Happy Days. The bronze medal went to Marge Simpson of The Simpsons. Well let’s see, as I recall Claire was always impeccably dressed, and kept a spotless home, she was able to do this even while having six children and pursuing a prestigious, full time career. Marian Cunningham always looked good in an apron and she was always smiling. Marge, well, she married Homer, (but I guess we can't hold that against her). Marge is patient, you have to give her that. How can we real life moms live up to any of that?

Maybe this will get you thinking of who your 3 favorite “mom role models” are in real life or on T.V. When my sister asked me who mine were; interestingly enough none of the shows I watched had a mother role model. My 3 Sons, Family Affair, Beverly Hillbillies, Andy Griffith, Petticoat Junction, I could go on and on. Well, I don’t know about you, but I am no Claire, Marian or Marge. I certainly fell short of hitting the mark of a perfect mother, so when it comes to Mother’s Day – I too have mixed feelings. And I know I am not alone. Lonnie let it be known that she told her kids years ago not to get her Hallmark Cards with those phony sentiments. We’re not perfect therefore why give us “Mother of the year award” I do however like the card - where the child says; “Mom we hired in help for you today so you could take the day off – and there on the front walk was a maid, a chef, a chauffeur, a pastor, fortune teller and a doctor. And when you open it says. . . Yeah, that sounds about right. Happy Mother’s Day!" When the expectations are for you to wear all of those hats how can you meet the mark so to speak?

Well, every one of us here has one thing in common – that’s for certain; we all have a mother. And we all had expectations of what a mother should be. We expected Mother to be there when we most need her. And we expected her to disappear when we didn’t want her around. A mom is someone you can go to for advice who has all the answers, because moms are supposed to know everything. And if we don’t, you can be sure sooner or later, we will find out for you!

I love the story about the worn-out mother who sent her little boy to bed, mumbling to himself, “How come every time she gets tired, I’m the one who has to take a nap?” Or there’s the one about the family that just had their fourth child, all under the age of five. So upon hearing the news, some friends sent a playpen over to the family, and a couple days later the playpen gift giver got a thank you card from the mother that read: “Just what I needed. I sit in it every afternoon and read, and the kids can’t get to me

There is no other job in the world that is as heart-breaking, nor as rewarding, as motherhood. And just the same, there is no other job that will ever have the influence, and the impact on the world, than being a mom. 90% of teenagers, when asked “who influences them most?” will answer that it was one of their parents. So, our influence as mothers can be a godly one, or a worldly one.

Madonna is quoted as having said; I was not the perfect mother, with my hectic career I realized early on how I fell short, so while my daughter was growing up I started a money jar. And every time I knew I had let my daughter down; I would put money in the jar. Upon her graduation I surprised her and gave her the money and told her to go get a good therapist.

No, I’m no perfect Hallmark card mother nor am I like the one from Proverb chapter 31 that is often used and quoted on Mother’s Day (on the front of our bulletin). Beginning with verse 10 it sounds like the poem “M is for the Many Things She Does for Us” or an Ancient Near Eastern version of a Hallmark Mother's Day card. M is for the multitasking, maniac mom. This text has traditionally been called "Ode to a woman of worth." It begins: “A woman of worth, who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her. She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. She rises while it is still night and provides food for her household. Her hands hold the spindle, and all her household is clothed in crimson. She reaches out her hands to the needy. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness Her children rise up and call her happy. Her husband, too, and he praises her. Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all. Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.” Well that is something to aspire to – but Lonnie and I agreed we really don’t like that text. No human woman could ever live up to that. It's a guilt trip waiting to happen!

Most of us think that this poem from chapter 31 in the Book of Proverbs is talking about the perfect human mother and homemaker. The “total woman”. Or as one smart aleck put it, "the totaled woman!" But what I found, upon further research is that commentators agree that it is not talking about a human woman at all, but another woman entirely. She shows up in chapter 1 standing in the marketplace, calling the young and foolish onto the path of God's wisdom. And again, in chapter 8, she calls the foolish to seek God's wisdom, and describes her role as a joyful helper with God in the Creation of flora and fauna. She shows up in chapter 9; where she builds the household of wisdom, and stands before her seven-pillared home inviting passersby to come and feast at her table. This is no maniacal, multitasking human mom, this is the wisdom of God; Sophia in the Greek. Sophia means wisdom. Sophia the image of wisdom, who was a prophetess.

So, throughout the 30 chapters that lead up to this final poem in chapter 31; Wisdom is inviting the reader into her household where she provides all those things that I read: food, clothing, light, wisdom, shelter. All metaphors for Divine nourishment and nurture. Just as Jesus provides for us today with a little wisdom as he commands us to love one another as God has loved us.

So, M is not for the million things you have to do today, or should have done yesterday or better do tomorrow to be the perfect hallmark mom. M is for the many ways God and God’s word – ie: God’s wisdom; nourish, nurture and guide us when we feel we just are not living up to societal or our children’s expectations. So, I want to end with these 5 key words from Jesus, which the apostle John gives us today; abide, love, joy, command and friends.

Let’s start with abide. Abide; (which we used last week as Jesus talked about abiding as the vine and the branches) characterizes a relationship of trust. Jesus abided in God’s love while on earth, and the disciples abided in Jesus’ love, and Jesus commands us to abide in God’s love. Jesus is saying; let those of us who are feeling that we are not fulfilling expectations abide in me. You who have regrets about your past relationships, abide in me. You who have serious doubts about whether you can handle what lies ahead of you, abide in me. You who seethe with resentment toward your parents abide in me. You who are lonely on a family day, and won’t be seeing your daughter or son; abide in me. You who are overburdened, doing the work of at least two people, abide in me. You who feel trapped in an unhealthy relationship, abide in me. You who have thoughts no "good mother" would have, abide in me. You who are in the grip of addiction—abide in me. Let those who grieve the loss of a child or a mother abide in me. The kingdom of heaven begins for you right now in the arms of abiding in your Lord.

Jesus says; “as God has loved me, so have I loved you. Then abide in my love. This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.” Today Jesus has a commandment for us. 1st Corinthians says; we are to “love others as ourselves.” Have you ever noticed that those who are the most critical of themselves are the most critical of others? We are not perfect Hallmark Card mothers – we are human. Sometimes we frown or there are tears in our eyes, sometimes we have hit our limit and are so tired and there is no twinkle in our eyes as we feel we have nothing left to give. We aren’t perfect because as my sister says; “I am not dead yet.” Meaning – I make mistakes. I am not perfect – but I love myself anyway. Thank God for the love of God – so that I can love myself enough - to love others.

Today Jesus assures us that we are no longer servants we are his friends. Jesus choses us to be his friends. And we all know what a joyous feeling it is to be chosen as someone’s friend. So, lighten up – Jesus commands all you mothers - for M is for the fact that in God’s eyes you ARE perfect and have met hit the mark. God loves you just as you are.

Let us pray: O God who cares that nothing be lost or neglected in the eternal scheme of things we come before you this Mother’s Day morning giving thanks for all mothers everywhere and all the love and life that you - and they - have given us. It is by your grace that “we live and move and have our very being.” Help us to be more fully yours that we may be more completely open and receptive to all your gifts. We thank you today for the gifts of our mothers and other significant women in our lives, women who have modeled for us courage and strength, compassion and love. We pray that we may in turn model these gifts for others particularly for our youth and children. Let us be more compassionate for we know that mothers and other care- givers have a mixture of satisfaction and frustration as they bring their children and loved ones through the various stages of life. We especially lift up those who have recently lost their mothers. May we all truly know the joy that makes us full which is in Christ. We lift up the names of those who…

Invocation: Lord, you who created us, sustain us, love and care for us, come to you with thankful hearts this morning for those times when we can bask in the comfort of your presence and can receive the strength we need for our daily encounters with life. Create in us a spirit which is open to your cleansing and invigorating power and draw us to yourself with encircling arms so that we might encourage, uphold, support and love one another - as we worship and praise you this hour.

Benediction: Go forth abiding in Christ’s love. Be joyous for the precious gift of relationships of love especially that of a Mother’s Love. Happy Mother’s Day to all of you moms.