

Sermon for Sunday, May 14, 1972 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

"ON LOAN TO GOD"

I Samuel 1:9-28

Text: "Therefore I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord. And they worshipped the Lord there." I Samuel 1:28

Mother's Day is important to us because it emphasizes the home and family in our lives. Mother has been its focus, the mainstay around which all of home life has revolved. Because this is true, I have observed over the years that when a mother dies, the children take it hardest. It does not matter how old the children are, for when mother dies something basic, something of the core of life, is forever gone. We take such losses hard.

Dr. Fosdick in his book A Faith for Tough Times, writes, "The family counts. It is humanity's primary cell. If a nation's homes disintegrate, nothing can be right." Yes, "humanity's primary cell"--isn't that an apt description of the home? And then Dr. Fosdick adds in a sobering strain, "Call that exaggeration, if you will, but the fact remains that the world never gets a Christ, or anyone Christlike, except through a Holy Family."

Another modern writer has emphasized the importance of the home this way, "It is certain that the attitudes of the home have more immediate and formative significance in the life of the growing child than to those of school or church." (Cully, Children in the Church) The remarks a parent makes as he reads his paper, his comments concerning friends, his attitude toward what is taught at church and school, will all be food for thought for the growing child. These are the factors that shape and influence his attitudes and his relationships and parents hold this awesome power in their hands.

A poet brings this sharply into focus for us when he writes:

They say that man is mighty,
He governs land and sea;
He wields a mighty scepter
On lower powers than he.

But mightier power and stronger
Man from his throne has hurled,
For the hand that rocks the cradle
Is the hand that rules the world.

The hand that rocks the cradle is indeed the hand that shapes and molds and determines what the grown man shall be and thereby ultimately determines what sort of people will rule the world.

Yet, the home--humanity's primary cell--is being seriously threatened in our day from without. For example, the tremendous political unrest of the world has caused tensions, fears and uncertainties. This general insecurity has spilled over into the home with deadly results. Another example is urbanization. The movement of our nation from a rural to an urban society has had a tremendous impact on home and family life. The old community influence over the life and activity of individuals is gone. Back in the days when most of us lived in the town and country areas, wherever the children went they were under the watchful eye of some member of the community who bore a responsibility for all the children. We were watched over and cared for and looked after. When trouble came up, whoever was nearest took care of us and we felt free to go to the home of anyone in the community for help. We belonged to the community and we felt cared for. But today, with the development of megalopolis and sprawling metropolitan areas, a person may have no meaningful membership in a group whose approval he needs or even highly values.

Another disintegrating factor on the home today is population mobility. People move often and in great numbers, resulting in a sense of uprootedness that adversely affects the home and family life. Just this past week I was talking with a teenager who has literally lived all over the world. The emotional impact this has had on her and the disintegrating force it has had on family relationships has been tragic.

But other kinds of outside pressures are brought to bear on the family. For example, Mr. Hoover, writing in the FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, said, "In the face of the nation's terrifying juvenile crime wave, we are threatened with a flood of movies and television presentations which flaunt indecency and applaud lawlessness." He went on to say, "Film trash-mills which persist in exalting violence and immorality, spew out celluloid poison which is destroying the impressionable minds of youth."

In addition, there are two important moral factors threatening the home today. One is the general degeneration of the attitude toward marriage. Marriage is no longer a deep and abiding and unbreakable commitment for life--"in plenty and in want; in joy and in sorrow; in sickness and in health; as long as we both shall live." No, it has become a mere contract of convenience for two people that may be broken at will. A recent issue of "Life" magazine carried an article on different so-called "styles" of marriage, including one in which the couple merely lived together.

The second moral factor is the so-called "new morality". This is surely a misnomer since it isn't new--it is as old as mankind--and it isn't morality but the reverse. Since the Kinsey report there seems to be the curious reasoning that breaking the moral code is not evil because lots of people are doing it. What a curiously naive logic when right and wrong is determined by how many are doing what. And most tragic of all, our modern liberal church leaders and theologians have abandoned the Bible as the basis of morality. The church has found herself in the dreadful position of supporting rampant immorality.

Yes, the home is humanity's primary cell and yes, the home is being seriously threatened from without in our day. Yet, the greatest threat is from within. The disintegration from within of the home is due to a lack of religious commitment and dedication on the part of parents. There is no doubt that a good program by the church and the school have real value. But most of its value depends upon its support by a favorable climate in the home. In the home--from which our children come--basic attitudes toward God, toward fellow man, toward country, toward life, are being developed and formed.

Dietrick Bonhoeffer was a German Christian who was imprisoned and executed by Hitler during the last Great War. While in prison, he wrote a letter to his family at Christmas. In part this is what he said, "I need not tell you how much I long to be released and to see you all again. But for years you have given us such lovely Christmasses, that our grateful memories are strong enough to cast their rays over a darker one. In times like these we learn as never before what it means to possess a past and a spiritual heritage untrammelled by the changes and chances of the present. A spiritual heritage reaching back for centuries is a wonderful support and comfort in face of all temporary stresses and strains." (Prisoner for God)

Do you see? The threats to life and home and family from without are of little importance when one is strong within. When a man has a great spiritual heritage that he can fall back on in times of great adversity and need, it cannot be trammelled underfoot by the changes and chances of the present. But, when from

within, there is no spiritual heritage, when from within there is no grateful memory of the soul, when from within there is no backlog of faith on which a man can draw in time of need, then there is no support and comfort in face of all temporary stresses and strains.

A child does not learn about love by discussion, but by being loved. He does not learn about self-giving through theory, but by the example of self-giving he finds in the family. By the same token, he learns about God from his parents. In prayers at meals and at bedtime, in the parent's attitude toward church and school, in the parent's attitude as to how life will be spent--in such simple ways he learns what God means to the adults who surround him.

Elton Trueblood in his little book, The Recovery of Family Life, makes this rather profound observation, "It is not necessary to invent a religious program for the home because the home is intrinsically a religious institution. Some times the religion inculcated in the family is bad religion, self-centered and contemptuous of others, sometimes it is a secular religion....but in any case the home is the place where most people receive their earliest and deepest convictions about that to which they are committed."

Perhaps our churches and schools today do need to work hard--desperately hard--on programs for youth and children. We need to take advantage of the best materials, the best leaders, the best teaching methods and techniques that are available. Ultimately, however, these will amount to little without strong, Christ-centered homes.

We need homes where responsible, dedicated parents are providing a spiritual atmosphere where a child first sees the face of Jesus Christ in the lives of his mother and father. The great Rufus Jones wrote of his home, "I am most of all thankful for my birthplace and early nurture in the warm atmosphere of a spiritually minded home...I never can be grateful enough for what was done for me by my progenitors before I came on the scene. They provided the spiritual atmosphere of my youth. I became heir of a vast, invisible inheritance. There is nothing I would exchange for that."

I hear many disturbing things about our youth today. The crime rate for those under 18 is spiraling and right here in St. Louis terrible things are happening among our youth. Our youth do not so much need better food or clothing, better education or recreation. They do not need so much better and faster cars, better times, and bigger allowances. No, they need better parents and they need better homes. They do not need more coddling, more wet-nursing, more spoon-feeding. They do need homes where God is the head of the house, where God is loved, served, worshipped and obeyed. They need homes where integrity, morality, honesty and industry are a natural part of the environment, for as Dr. Fosdick put it, "The world never got a Christ, or anyone Christlike, except through a Holy Family."

In our scripture for this morning we read the story of the family from which Samuel came. Samuel is a sort of watershed in the Old Testament. He is truly one of the great figures of Jewish history. He has been called the last of the Judges, the first of the Prophets, and the maker of Kings. The Bible tells us what sort of home produced this great spiritual giant. It was a Godly home; a home where Samuel himself was an answer to prayer; a home where he was dedicated to God from the beginning; a home where the family was deeply involved in their religious faith and who year by year made the journey to the temple of the Jews to worship and make their sacrifices. He was born into a family faithful in their religious obligations and in their commitment to the Lord. As his mother put it

when Samuel was born, "Therefore have I lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives he is lent to the Lord." What our city, our world, our church needs are parents who are making Godly homes where children are on loan to the Lord. We need homes where God is put first and where children are raised in an atmosphere that they are deeply aware from the beginning of the importance of faith and the knowledge that they are on loan to God. No, the world never got a Christ, or anyone Christ-like, except through a Holy Family.

Yes, it is true that the hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that ultimately rules the world. It is true because it is the home that ultimately makes a person who and what he is. Surely our world today desperately needs holy families who are producing children who are on loan to God.

Many centuries ago a man named Joshua said to his people, "Choose ye this day whom you will serve--but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." As we celebrate Mother's Day and as we think about the home--humanity's primary cell--we need to recommit ourselves to the One we will serve--we need to produce holy families for without holy families the world never gets a Christ or anyone Christlike.