

Sermon for Sunday, May 12, 1974 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

"AN OUNCE OF MOTHER IS WORTH A POUND OF PREACHER"

Proverbs 31:10-31

Text: "Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised." Proverbs 31:30

In his little book, A Faith For Tough Times, Dr. Fosdick writes, "the family counts, it is humanity's primary cell. If a nation's homes disintegrate, nothing can be right." (p. 73-4) The basic element of the human body is the cell and to call the home "humanity's primary cell," tells us a great deal about the centrality of the home. Dr. Fosdick goes on to add in a sobering strain, "the fact remains that the world never gets a Christ, or anyone Christlike, except through a Holy Family." Yes, an ounce of holy mother is worth a pound of preacher.

Another modern writer speaks of 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 do those of school or church. (Cully, Children in the Church, P. 78) The remarks a parent makes as he reads his newspaper, his comments concerning friends, his attitude about church and morality, about right and wrong, are food for thought that shape and mold the lives of children and an ounce of holy mother is worth a pound of church or preacher.

Some poet has written,
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
Many from his throne has hurled
For the hand that rocks the cradle
Is the hand that rules the world

Yes, the hand that rocks the cradle is indeed the hand that shapes and molds and determines what the grown man shall be. Consequently that hand ultimately determines what sort of people shall rule the world. An ounce of holy mother is worth a pound of preacher.

Dietrick Bonhoeffer was a German Christian who was imprisoned and eventually executed by Hitler in World War II. While in prison he wrote a letter to his family at Christmas time. 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 Christmases, 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, page 58-59)

Yes, an ounce of Godly family life and of a holy mother are worth many pounds of preacher. The threats of life and home and family from without are of little importance when one is spiritually strong from within--an inner strength that comes from a Godly home and a holy mother.

You see, 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. He really learns about God in the home--by prayers at meals and at bedtime, in the parents' attitudes toward church and sacred things, in the attitudes he finds at home about the meaning and value of life and how it will be

spent. It is indeed true that an ounce of holy mother is worth many pounds of preaching.

As Dr. Elton Trueblood, in one of his books puts it, "It is not necessary to invent a religious program for the home because the home is intrinsically a religious institution. Sometimes 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 which they are committed." Yes, a pound of holy mother is worth a ton of preaching.

Now, there are two questions I want to raise this morning. One is addressed to you mothers. 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." Now the question I want to raise for you mothers today is this: Is that the sort of inheritance you are giving your children?

We hear a lot about the problems we are having with youth today--young people experimenting with drugs, dropping out of society, the spiraling crime rate, and many other disturbing things about them. I do not know how much of this is true, although I assume a large part of it is. But there is one thing I know without question. Our youth do not need so much 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 mothers and they need better fathers and better homes as well. They do need homes where a mother loves God, serves and worships Him and obeys His holy laws. The great Sir Walter Scott's mother was a superior woman, well educated and a lover of the finer things in life. Napoleon once said, "Let France have good mothers and she will have good sons." Lord Bacon's mother was a woman of superior mind and deep devotion to God while on the other hand Nero's mother was greedy, lustful and a murderess. The mother of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was intellectually alert and extremely well organized. She taught her children at age one to fear the rod and cry softly. At age five each child was started on reading the Bible.

Before his death J. Edgar Hoover spoke before the Senate committee investigating crime in interstate commerce. Mr. Hoover said, "The home is the great training school in behavior or misbehavior, and parents serve as the first teachers for the inspirational education of youth....Here the spade work is laid for instilling in the child those values which will cause him to develop into an upright, law-abiding citizen...He must be taught the necessity for obeying the laws of God."

Dr. Payton, a famous preacher once said, "What if God should place a diamond in your hand and tell you to inscribe on it a sentence which should be read at the last day and shown there as an index of your thoughts and feelings! what care, what caution you would exercise in the selection!" Mothers, that is what God has done. He has placed before us the immortal minds of our children, less perishable than the diamond, on which we are inscribing every day and every hour by our instruction, by our spirit, by our example something that will remain and be exhibited for or against you at the judgment day.

A mother who laughs at the Bible or degrades it may have started her child on the way

to becoming a champion agnostic. A mother who ridicules the moral standards of the Scriptures may have given her son a good start on the road to debauchery. On the other hand, the mother who suggests that her daughter give a dime to a lame girl or take flowers to a shut-in may have launched the career of an orphanage supervisor. The mother who illustrates by life the importance of truth, the wrong of a lie, the loveliness of compassion, and the rewards of self-denial, will be sowing the seeds of a life of value. You see, an ounce of holy mother, is worth a pound of preacher. I once had a mother call me up in great ire. Her daughter who was over 20 had finally come to church with her. Being a conservative, my sermon did not fit in with the extremely liberal life-style of the young lady. "I got her to church and you didn't preach what she needed to hear," she said, "you failed me and I may leave the church." "Dear lady," I said, "how can you expect me to do or to undo what you have spent twenty years in doing." Yes, an ounce of mother is worth a pound of preacher.

There are many sorry mothers in our society. All about us are mothers who have no vital faith in God, no spiritual aspirations for themselves or their children, and no real concern for deep and abiding things. Their hopes are mundane and their standards worldly. They are shallow, carnal-minded and materialistic. They have substituted conventions for convictions, fads for faith, society for sobriety and sociability for responsibility. The Bible says "Forsake not the teaching of thy mother." What teaching? It may sound harsh, but if some of our youth live godly lives it will have to be in spite of their parents.

So to you mothers I would say, be sure your sins are forgiven, that your standards are transformed by God, your sense of values altered by the teachings of the Bible, and your aspirations redirected by Jesus. You see, without a redeemed, consecrated motherhood, we are fighting a losing battle for a new and better society. When our mothers return to God, God will return to our homes. An ounce of mother is worth a pound of preacher. As our text puts it, "a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised."

I said earlier I wanted to raise two questions. The first question is addressed to you mothers, some of you whose halos have slipped and are tarnished, and that question is, what kind of a mother are you for an ounce of mother is worth a pound of preacher. The other question is raised for those of us who are honoring our mothers today. Some of us are wearing white roses for a mother who has passed on, others a red one for mothers still living. After church this morning the children and I will go to the cemetery to Elizabeth's grave. We have bought some red roses to place there. We chose red roses because we know she is alive and well for she is with our living Lord. But the question is this, how are we really honoring our mothers? Are the flowers we wear, or the flowers we send, or the flowers we place at some grave simply a sentimental tribute? If that is all they are, they are simply a sentimental tribute. I would hope that mother's day would be a reaffirmation of our loyalty to her ideals and faith.

Today we say we love our mothers. But what kind of love is it? Is it a love that is a mere sentimentality or is it a love of fidelity to who and what she was? Does our love exhaust itself in poetry and flowers, telegrams and candy? You see, the Bible says, "My son...forsake not the teaching of thy mother." Is the day one in which our conscience bids us walk in her holy ways?

Jesus once said, "Why do you call me, 'lord, lord' and do not the things which I say?" That's what our mothers want from us--she does not want sentimental eulogy. The gift which a mother desires above all other gifts is a son or daughter whose life reflects her cherished ideals. She does not so much want praise as she does allegiance to the best in her own life. Cards, flowers and gifts only bring pain to our

mothers if we abandon their best teachings and their highest ideals

So my question of all of us--for we all have mothers--is this: Are you honoring your mother today by being true to her? You young people--are her hopes and dreams and prayers being realized in your? Are you living the kind of life that will crown her years with joy. For those of us who are older, whose mothers may have gone to be with Jesus, let me say this: today is a time to rededicate yourself to those best principles and finest examples your mother tried to instill in you. That is how to truly celebrate Mother's Day. You see, an ounce of holy mother truly honored is worth many pounds of preaching.

I have two daughters, one just turned fourteen and one not quite yet sixteen. As a father there is so much I don't know about raising girls or helping them with the problems and decisions they will face. But I have found the secret of helping them. I say to them, "Remember the person your mother was and what she hoped and expected of you. Do what you think she would want you to do and expect you to do and you can't go wrong." You see, I know that when they are in danger of tumbling over some precipice of temptation, they will be rescued by a piece of their mother's apron-string which will catch on something in their lives and hold them safe. An ounce of a godly mother will be worth a pound of preacher father.

So to you mothers I would say, be sure your standards are transformed by God, your sense of values altered by the teachings of the Bible, and your aspirations redirected by Jesus. You see, without a redeemed, consecrated motherhood, we are fighting a losing battle for a new and better society. When our mothers return to God, God will return to our homes. An ounce of mother is worth a pound of preacher. As our text says, "A woman who fears the Lord is to be praised."

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