

Sermon for Sunday, May 9, 1976, by Andrew A. Jumper, Senior Pastor, D.D.
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

HOW FAR DO APPLES FALL FROM THE TREE?

II Timothy 1:5

Text: "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you."
II Timothy 1:5

Today is Mother's Day and I was wondering what you think of when you think of the word "mother". Of course, first of all you think of your own mother. But if I asked you to think of an idea of the perfect mother, what do you picture in your mind? Is she a sweet little old gray haired lady, rocking in her chair and sewing away at something? Well, let me tell you the truth about mother! Today mother lives, on an average, 4-1/2 years longer than dad. Mother is the beneficiary of 80% of all life insurance and spends 85% of the family income--and probably has a pretty good say about the other 15%! Mother has a majority of the votes in America, she owns 80% of all real estate, she possesses 50% of all stock in industrial corporations and just to put some icing on the cake, she has an average of 92 labor-saving devices in her home. By all odds, mother is the most powerful person in American society. Yet, I have not mentioned the greatest power that mother has. The greatest power that mother has is the power of her influence over her children and even over her grandchildren.

My grandfather, who was a country doctor, lived across the street from me when I was a child. He was concerned that my mother raise me properly and I can remember him saying to her, "Daughter, apples do not fall very far from the tree". I did not know what he meant then, but over the years I have had a growing appreciation for what he said. One of our modern writers has said, "...the world never gets a Christ, or anyone Christlike, except through a Holy Family." And isn't that true? A student of child psychology writes, "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." You see, the remarks a parent makes as he reads his paper, his comments concerning friends, his attitude toward what is taught at school and church, will all be food for thought for the growing child. These are the factors that shape the little apple, which influence his attitudes, his relationships and which determine how far he falls from the tree.

One writer has said, "A mother who laughs at the Bible may have started her child on the way to becoming a champion agnostic. A mother who ridicules the morale 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 a career for an orphanage supervisor." Yes, the home has incredible power to shape and mold and influence who and what a child becomes. Take for example Moses in the Old Testament. Did you ever stop to wonder why Moses, who was raised in the lap of luxury in the Pharaoh's court, gave all of that up to identify himself with a poor, slave people? Well, I don't think we can separate it from his mother. She was his paid nurse during those early formative years. The influence she had on him was ultimately to shape the destiny of the world.

No, the world never got a Christ or anyone Christlike, except through a Holy Family. Suppose, as Dr. Payson suggests, God should place a diamond in your hand and tell you to write 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, would you exercise in the selection of that one single sentence! Yet, for parents, that is exactly what God has done. He has placed in our hand the immortal minds and souls of our children. On their lives, their hearts, their characters, we are inscribing every day and every hour by our instruction, by our attitudes, by our example, something that will be forever written; something that will stand on exhibit at Judgment Day. And you and I will get credit for what is written on the hearts of our children for good or for bad. And that, dear friends, is a very sobering thought.

In our scripture for this morning we read about a young man in trouble. His name was Timothy. Young Timothy was a pastor and apparently he was having difficulties. He was being persecuted for his faith. He was undergoing trials and tribulations. Apparently the rejection he was experiencing and the difficulties he underwent brought him to tears for St. Paul writes to him, "I remember your tears..." Yet, in spite of his problems, Timothy had two things going for him. Let me share those two things with you.

In the first place, Timothy had a rich, spiritual heritage. St. Paul writes to him, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you." I want you grandparents to notice that verse of Scripture! You may feel that once your children leave home your job is done. That simply isn't true. As long as you live you will be an influence on the lives of those you love and those who love you. Don't think that what you do, what you say, how you act and how you live doesn't matter anymore. It does. I know that the lives and characters of my grandparents were a tremendous influence on me and I know many Christians today who testify to the influence of a godly grandparent. By the same token a poor influence or a bad example by grandparents may greatly diminish the efforts a son or a daughter is making to bring a child up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Back during World War II a young German named Dietrick Bonhoeffer was put in prison by Hitler because he was a Christian. He suffered greatly for his faith and yet he managed to reach out to other prisoners and share Jesus with them. Just before Allied troops took the prison where he was held, he was executed. Shortly before his death he wrote to his family at Christmas time and 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." Do you see? When from within one is spiritually strong, when from within one has a spiritual heritage to fall back on, he cannot be trampled underfoot by adversities of the present.

A child does not learn about love by discussion, but by being loved. He does not learn about self-giving through talk, but by the example of self-giving he finds in the family. By the same token, he learns about God from his family. In prayers at meals and at bedtime, in the parent's attitude toward church and school, in the parent's attitudes about life--in such simple ways he learns what God means to those adults who surround him and that little apple will not fall very far from the tree.

So young Timothy had problems but he had something going for him. First, he had a rich spiritual heritage. Notice in the second place that he had God's Spirit in his

heart. St. Paul writes, "Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you..." And then he goes on to say that God had given Timothy "...a spirit of power and love and self-control". I want you to know that as a parent and as a pastor that gives me a great sense of relief. You see, no matter how hard I try to have a proper Christian home and no matter how hard I try to be a good example, I always fail. How gratifying it is to know that above and beyond what I do, God is also at work in my children and in my congregation. So it works out this way: provide the sort of spiritual environment for your children as though it all depended on you and then thank God that in the long run He can overcome your mistakes.

May I say a word to those of you who did not have a good spiritual environment. In many ways your environment shaped and molded you into who and what you are. But you do not have to remain bound by the chains of your past. No, God's spirit working within you can change you if you will let Him. If you will surrender your heart, your ego, the seat of your will to Jesus, God can work a miracle in your life. He can change you. If you will invite Jesus into your heart, ask Him to take control of your life, He can break the bondage of your past; He can change your habit patterns, your life-style, and make you into a new person.

Next Sunday we are going to begin our financial campaign to raise funds to expand our facilities and to widen the ministry of Central to St. Louis. On this Mother's Day when we are honoring our mothers and remembering the power of the influence of parents in the home, let me remind us of how this building drive relates to all of us. First, it relates to our outreach for Jesus. With new facilities we will be better able to teach young children and to reach more of them. With our youth center we will be able to touch the lives of many more young people. As an indication of how we are touching the lives of young people already let me remind you that we now have about eight young men under care of the Session for the ministry and several more who will be coming under care in the future. That means that many other lives have also been touched for Jesus because not every Christian goes into the ministry. But who knows what we can do for the Lord in reaching young people with better facilities.

But there is a second way that this building program relates to each of us as families. How we respond to this challenge, how we invest ourselves and how we give sacrificially will not be lost on the children and young people of this congregation. How each of us responds will make an impression on those we love the most. From our response they will know how much it matters and how much we care. This beautiful sanctuary in which we sit this morning is the gift of those who loved God and who cared for their children's spiritual heritage. Now it is our turn to care--to care and to pass on to our children a spiritual heritage.

No, an apple does not fall very far from the tree. In our generation so many mothers--and fathers, too--need to find God. To put it bluntly, they need to be converted--to have their sins forgiven, their standards transformed, their sense of values altered and their aspirations redirected. 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, and when God lives in our homes, America is secure.

Dr. Charles R. Brown, a professor for many years at Yale, describes his mother this way, "The strongest, the sweetest, the holiest earthly influence which ever made itself felt upon my own life was that of my dear mother...When we were asleep, she would come in and kneel at our bedsides, praying for each child by name and by need.

must plant your tree.