

Sermon for Sunday, May 13, 1979, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"WHEN THE HOME BECOMES A COURTROOM"

Joshua 24:14-28

Text: "Then Joshua said to the people, 'You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him.'" Joshua 24:22

Someone vandalized my mailbox this week. It happened to a lot of mail boxes in our neighborhood. I worked hard to put in the post for the mailbox. I bought a good redwood post, my father-in-law helped me and we dug a hole, braced the post, and then poured in a concrete mix. After it was all set, I attached the mailbox. I had spent quite a few dollars on the box and the post and had invested a lot of energy and effort in putting it up. Then, the other night, someone "for fun" came along and deliberately pushed against the post until it was shattered. I've thought about it a lot since. Why did someone do that? What pleasure did he get out of destroying property? What sort of emotional needs did it meet in that person's life to do that?

A modern writer says something about the home that I want to share with you. She 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 church and school". (Cully, Children in the Church) That means that no matter how good the schools are or how good the church is, the most important thing in a child's life is what he learns at home. The remarks a parent makes as he reads his paper, his comments about friends, his attitude toward what is happening in the world, what he says about other people, how he values those of other races, are all food for thought for a growing child. These attitudes about others, about right and wrong, are being shaped and molded in the home. A poet has aptly expressed it when he wrote,

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.

What kind of hand rocked the cradle of the person who destroyed my mailbox? What did that person learn from his parents about the rights of others and the value of the property of others, about respect for decency and law? I'm sure that person's parents did not consciously and overtly teach him to do the things he did. But by their attitudes and life-styles, they communicated something to him that he was acting out by smashing mailboxes.

In Israel, in the city of Nazareth, there is a beautiful church that marks the site where Jesus' home was when he was being raised. On the front of the church, carved in stone, is a picture of Mary, Joseph and Jesus, the holy family. It is a beautiful sermon--it says to us that the world never gets a Christ, nor anyone Christ-like, apart from a holy family.

Today is mother's day. There is no great virtue in being a mother, at least biologically. Any girl who has reached puberty is biologically capable of being a mother. No, what we ought to celebrate today are mothers and homes where there are and where there have been holy mothers, holy families, which have produced and will produce boys and girls with Christ-like qualities. Is that what your home is like? What kind of a hand is rocking the cradle at your house?

There are many pressures on the modern home today. We have just gone through a decade when the home and the family have been under attack. For example, Donna Iven, Chairman of the Department of Sociology at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago requires in her courses the reading of Shulamith Firestone, the far-out feminist who urges that children be born outside of the mother's body via artificial fertilization and gestation because pregnancy and childbirth are a drag. "We hope," said Professor Iven, "That our students will begin to question the values that they have always taken for granted about the value of monogamous marriage and a family and at least consider the alternatives." A book--among many--that attacks the family is entitled, "The Family in Search of a Future: Alternate Models for Moderns." Some of the alternate models it suggests are group marriage, homosexual marriage, sex outside marriage, communal families and polygamy. Another book is entitled "The Family in Transition: Re-Thinking Marriage". It includes a chapter that is entitled, "Mate Swapping: The Family That Swings Together Clings Together". The two books I have mentioned are required reading on more than a hundred college campuses. Yes, the home is under dreadful attack. As a consequence of these bombardments, by 1971 a survey showed that 34% of college students (that's one out of three) believe marriage was obsolete

But in spite of these attacks on the family from without, what will ultimately shape the lives of boys and girls as they become young men and women is the kind of hand that rocked their cradle. You see, a child doesn't learn about self-giving, about the value of others, about integrity, through theory. No, he learns by what he finds in his own family. For example, he learns most about God not from Sunday School or Church, but from his parents. By prayers at mealtime--or their absence--in the parents attitude toward church and Bible teaching, in their attitude about money and giving to the church, he learns what is really important in the lives of his parents and from those values, his life is shaped. He will not be much different from the non-verbal communication he is getting in the home about religious things.

In our Scripture this morning the Bible brings us to the end of the life of Joshua. He had taken over the leadership of Israel after the death of Moses, and now he has grown old. He calls together the people of God and he reminds them of all the things God has done for them. Then he makes his famous statement, "choose this day whom you will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Have you made that kind of commitment in your home? Is that the kind of decision you have made about your family, your children? And when Joshua challenged the people of Israel, the Bible tells us they responded, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods.." And when they said that Joshua made the reply that is our text for this morning. He said, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him."

Well, that is a frightening statement. We are witnesses against ourselves that we have chosen the Lord to serve him. Our own homes are on trial and we are the witnesses against ourselves. Imagine yourself in a courtroom where God is the judge. There is a witness on the stand and he is giving witness about you. That witness will either exonerate you or condemn you. Look closely at the face of that witness and you will recognize your own face. What are you saying about yourself?

I can't answer that, but I can raise some questions for us that each of us can answer for himself. Why is it that many of our children are not regular in Sunday School? Is it their fault? Or is it that we parents find other things to do--we take a trip, we sleep in late, we have friends over and so we are too

busy to attend Sunday School regularly. What do you think our children learn from that? Have we come to the conclusion that the Christian training of our children is no longer important, or have we simply let other things interfere? And how about our young people? Why is it that many of our youth are not a part of the program of the church? What other things could possibly be more important? Now, I know young people. They will complain. They will say they don't like the teacher. They will say the material is not good. They will say they are bored and are not learning anything. But young people are like that. And let me ask this, where else will they get anything like Christian training and teaching? If they are not required to participate in what the church has to offer, are you providing them something better as a substitute?

Again, listen to the witness. The judge is speaking and asking if the defendant has led his children to a personal relationship to Jesus. When Andrew heard Jesus preach, the first thing he did was to go looking for his brother. He found Peter and told him that he had found the Messiah and brought him to Jesus. I was talking to one of my young officers the other day and he was telling me about a trip he and his wife had made and how he had been praying for an opportunity to share with his brother how Jesus had changed his life. God honored that prayer and gave him that chance. Are you praying about a chance to share Jesus with your children? Do you remember the story of Noah in the Old Testament? The Bible tells us that Noah preached 120 years and in all that time he had only seven converts. But do you know who those converts were? They were his own family. When Noah got to heaven he could look around and see all of his children there. Will you and I be able to do that? And how are we going to feel and how will we explain it to God if some of our own family is missing? I tell you, when we keep our children out of Sunday School, when we permit our youth to miss church and youth group, we are preaching them a sermon they won't soon forget. When we get to heaven and look around, if some of our children are missing, we will wish we had done something different, but it will be too late.

Yes, the home is a courtroom, and we parents are on trial. The witness up there on the stand giving his testimony can save us or condemn us, and we ourselves are that witness. When we have time for bridge and golf and the country club and social activities, when our bar bill at the club is larger than our pledge to the church, when children see their grandparents wearing fine clothes and driving expensive cars and are aware of how little they give to the church, we are telling them an awful lot about what is important in life. And maybe you think because your children are raised, it doesn't matter any more. But the most important male figure in my young life was my grandfather. What he did had a tremendous influence on me. To this day I can see him, when he was old and crippled, walking to church with his cane because he thought it was important. To this day I can see him and my grandmother, both stiff with age and arthritis, kneeling down on the floor on the church when the preacher prayed. And I am certain in my own heart that a great deal of the credit goes to him for the fact that I am in the ministry today. As a child, near bedtime, I used to go across the street to their home and they would always read the Bible together and pray. I don't remember what they read and I don't remember the prayers, but I will never forget the sense of awe and reverence I felt sitting there with them. Whoever you are, you are still having an incredible impact on the lives of others.

No, the world never got a Christ nor anyone Christ-like without a Holy Family. Is your's a Holy Family? Listen to the witness on the stand. The courtroom grows quiet. The witness speaks. What does the witness say?