

Mother's Day Looking Back

It's Mother's Day, Pandemic style. Moms, I hope you know we love and appreciate you and we honor you on this special day even if circumstances may prevent us from celebrating as usual. Certainly if you are a mother of children 18 or younger you deserve extra honor since during these past few weeks some of you have been mom and teacher and principle and p.e. coach and cafeteria lady and bus driver and referee and I don't know what else in addition to your regular job and responsibilities. Well done Mom! Class is about over and you made it! We honor you and salute you! Happy Mother's Day! You may not be someone's mother, but all of us had one. If your mom is alive, find a way to honor her today. Those of us whose Moms are already in heaven, we can give thanks to God for that person that gave us life and if we were fortunate enough to have a Mom that loved God and loved us, we can give double thanks to the Lord, can't we?

I've said in recent weeks while we keep saying none of us have ever lived in times like these, there are some folks in our church that have lived through unprecedented times before. We still have members who recall the days of WWII, with the rationing of goods and products here at home while the whole world was at war. Meat and sugar and coffee were rationed as was gasoline and tires for your car and a host of other things. So, if we're experiencing shortages of certain things today, don't worry, we aren't the first. We survived that before and we can look back and take hope, we will survive this as well.

The prophet Isaiah had a suggestion on how to get through tough times. Isaiah seems to speak to conditions in his own time, but then also to speak prophetically of days in the future, when exiles would return to Judah and to Jerusalem long after his death. Isaiah 51 seems to speak of that time. The people return but everything's different. What do they do? It's post exile, kind of like us trying to figure out what life is supposed to be like post-covid19, post pandemic. The people of the southern kingdom of Judah would be without a king, without an army, without their independence. Isaiah tells them a Suffering Servant would eventually come, the Messiah, anointed by the Spirit and he would redeem and restore and announce good news, he would bear their sins and iniquities and make them whole. They were to seek after the Lord and trust in him, anticipating that day. In the meantime, he suggests they look back for some wisdom on how to live. Look at Isaiah 51.

“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; look to Abraham your father and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was but one and I blessed him and made him many.” Isaiah 51:1-2 Trying to figure out how to go forward, after the exile, Isaiah tells them to look back and remember Abraham and Sarah. I like that he said “remember the rock from which you were cut, the quarry from which you were hewn.” He is reminding them they are made out of the right stuff. “Like a rock.” You are going to make it through this because you come from the right stock. He wanted them to look back and remember Mom and Dad and the miracle story of their nation and their heritage and God’s provision.

If you were raised by godly parents or grandparents, then thank God for your heritage. Look back and remember the influencers, Mom and all the others that led you to Jesus! Remember the miracles and the stories of God’s provision. Isaiah told them to look back to Sarah who gave them birth. Let me mention a couple of things we see when we look back to Sarah, the mother of the nation of Israel.

Sarah trusted God in spite of the circumstances. She was 90 and Abraham was 100 when God promised them they would have a child. It was impossible by human reckoning. It couldn’t happen. The bible says of Sarah that her womb was dead, yet in spite of impossible circumstances she and Abraham **“...did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God but were strengthened in their faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.” Romans 4:20**

God has power to do what he promised. Abraham believed that. Sarah believed that. Isaiah wanted the people returning from the exile to believe it. We need to believe it today. God has power to do what he promised. He will provide. He will make a way where there doesn’t seem to be a way. He will see us through, regardless of the circumstances. The bible says of Abraham, **“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him.” Romans 4:18.** Against all hope, believe. Trust God in spite of the circumstances, in spite of the pandemic, the economy. Keep trusting God!

Sarah obeyed God in spite of the challenges. The writer of Hebrews speaks of Abraham and that means Sarah as well, that **“By faith Abraham when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know**

where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents...these people were still living by faith when they died...they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth...they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.” Hebrews 11:8-16

Isaiah told the people returning from exile to look back to Abraham and Sarah, at how they lived. They lived by faith until death, obeying God in spite of the challenges. Going wherever God told them to go, living as strangers and aliens. Some of you moms may love camping, but I doubt you want to give up your home for a permanent tent. Sarah and Abraham learned to hold loosely to the things of earth because material things didn't matter as much as obedience to God. It would have been easier to stay in Haran, their home, instead of traipsing off to literally “God's knows where”, but obedience to God wasn't just one option, it was the only option. They made the choice. Regardless of the challenges they were going to obey God! Anything this life could offer couldn't compare to the heavenly home that God was preparing for them. They knew obedience to God was the pathway to life eternal. Nothing is as important.

Don't worry too much about what you may lose in the pandemic because it can't compare to what God is preparing for us if we continue to walk in faith and in obedience to him. You've heard me say it, Obedience to God always intersects with God's provision. Obey God and he will provide. Trust God because he is able. Things are different. Things are going to be different. For the exiles that returned to Jerusalem, things were different, it wasn't going to be the same as before, but God was still faithful then just as he had been to Abraham and Sarah in their day. Look back and remember, God was the one that promised; they could trust him then and we can trust him now. Their obedience led to God's provision and there were greater victories and blessings ahead. I don't know what the future holds, but I know the way forward is to trust God in spite of the circumstances because he is faithful and he is able. I know obeying him is the only path I care to follow!

Sarah kept the faith and passed it to the next generation. The writer of Hebrews mentioned that while Abraham and Sarah lived in tents in the promised land, so did Isaac and Jacob, their son and grandson, “who were heirs with them of the same promise.” Mom and Dad, the greatest responsibility you have after making sure of your own salvation and your own relationship with the Lord is to pass your faith to your children. You see, the family was God's

original relay system. This was his plan for delivering the faith from one generation to the next. Parents are to teach their children, by word and by action the ways of God. One generation is to impart to the next a vibrant and living faith in the living God.

These past few weeks have given an unprecedented opportunity for God's original faith relay system to come into play. While you've had online help from Pastor Brittany and Pastor Jeff, it's kind of been up to you, Mom and Dad, to share your faith, to talk about the things of God with your kids as never before because you couldn't just drop them off at church. The great command to Israel, the centerpiece of the Jewish faith declares, **"Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up...Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:4-9.**

It's the prescription for passing the faith during the pandemic: talk about the Lord when you sit at home, when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Point your children to Jesus and to the faith. That's the key. That's how you move forward into whatever the future is going to be, imparting to them a faith that will carry them through whatever life may bring, whatever it may hold, post-exile and post-pandemic.

I hope you were blessed to have someone that imparted the faith to you. If you did, let me ask you, **Are you consistently imparting to your children the faith that was imparted to you?** Are you pointing them to Jesus like someone pointed you to Jesus? Are you teaching them and modeling for them what it means to trust God in spite of the circumstances and to obey God in spite of the challenges? I've been saying this was the year to come home to Carbondale. Some of you watching today, you had parents or grandparents that were part of this church. They imparted the faith to you but something got in the way and you aren't in church and you aren't raising your children in church, you aren't imparting the faith to your kids the way your grandparents and parents imparted the faith to you. It's not too late to make a change. It's not only for you and about you but the next generation is dependent upon your faithfulness, your diligence to guard the faith, to preserve it, and to pass it on to them. The generations ahead are depending on you and your choice today!

The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy and said, **“I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and I am persuaded now lives in you also.” 2 Timothy 1:5.** The faith had been passed to him. Are you passing the faith that was imparted to you? If you don’t have children, you can still impart the faith to the next generation! The Psalmist said, **“One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty...they will tell of the power of your awesome works...they will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness.” Psalm 145**

Isaiah told them to look back and remember Abraham and Sarah, remember the story, remember the heritage, remember the rock they were cut from. Tell the story Mom and Dad, tell the story, whether you have children or not, trust God, obey God, pass the faith, commend the works of God to the next generation.

Let me tell you a story I’ve shared a couple of times over the years about a couple of godly women. Somewhere around 1856 a couple named John and Margaret moved with their two young daughters from Kentucky to Arkansas to start a new life. They began to farm and raise their young family somewhere around Madison County. While in Arkansas two sons were born and another daughter. When the Civil War found its way to Arkansas John was conscripted into the Union Army November 12th 1862, along with his brother-in-law. Just two months later in January of 1863, after the battle of Prairie Grove, John caught pneumonia due to exposure and died at the Regimental Hospital in Fayetteville, Arkansas, leaving behind his young widow with five children. After his death, Margaret felt the best thing, perhaps the only thing to do was to take the kids and go back to Kentucky where her family lived. I can’t imagine what that required, but that is what she did, apparently making this dangerous trip by wagon and on foot, alone with five children during the Civil War. Records indicate one daughter died on the trip back to Kentucky.

Margaret raised those children alone, raising them to know the Lord, to love God in spite of the tragedy and the loss they suffered. She was determined to pass the faith to her children. Nothing was more important. Nothing would stop her.

One of those children, in fact the first son to be born in Arkansas, was named Pleasant. They called him Pleas or P.I. At the age of 12, the Kentucky Census listed him as a farm hand. Life was hard without a father, but Margaret did the best she could. Pleas acquired a basic

education, married when he was 20 and raised his family there. He was a coal miner, a farmer, ran a mill, and was a Primitive Baptist preacher. Around the turn of the century the message of Pentecost came to that part of Kentucky and Pleas was one of those who was baptized in the Holy Spirit. He was eventually asked to leave his Baptist church, but continued to preach and serve the Lord as part of the Church of God Mountain Assembly until his death at the age of 59.

One of his sons, Stephen Melvin married a Kentucky girl named Fannie (named after the hymn writer Fannie Crosby) on Christmas Day, 1904. Ten years later in 1914 he moved his wife and at that time five children to Indiana where he worked in the strip mines and farmed, like his father. Interestingly, Melvin went ahead to find a place to live and then sent for Fannie and the kids. On the way there, their train was delayed. Fannie prepared to spend the night in the train station with five little children, with no money for supper or anything else when a man showed up. He told her God spoke to his wife and told her there was a woman with five children in trouble at the train station and he had come to help. He took her and the kids to their home, where his wife fed them and gave them a place to sleep until the next day when they caught the train on to Indiana. There is blessing and provision when you obey God! Three more children were born to Melvin and Fannie in Indiana. Fifteen years later he moved the family from the farm to the big city, to Indianapolis. Their oldest son had found a job at the Morman Auto Company and had arranged a job for his father there as well. Melvin was hoping for a better life for his family but unfortunately, just a few weeks after moving to the city, he fell ill and died on May 11, 1929, 91 years ago tomorrow. He was 48 years old. His wife was only 41 and still had 4 of their eight children at home to care for, the youngest being seven years old. The next to the youngest of those eight children was my mom, Thelma Cox. She was nine when her father died.

Now, like Margaret who was left a widow in the Civil War with five young children, my grandmother was left to figure out how to live and to impart the faith to her children. This young widow was to make sure that in spite of poverty, in spite of the untimely death of her husband, in spite of the Great Depression and the stock market crash occurring just a few months later, in spite of all the circumstances that seemed to be against them, she would impart to her children a living faith that would keep them throughout their lifetime in a rapidly changing world.

I can't begin to imagine what it was like for Margaret Cox in 1863 to take her five children and start back across the United States from Arkansas to Kentucky, burying a child along the way, but she was determined to take care of her family, to get them back home, to trust

God in spite of the circumstances and to obey God in spite of the challenges. You see, when Jesus is all you've got, you make sure you guard your faith. When you know your children could be lost if you don't model the way of Christ before them, you do what you must do.

I can't imagine what it was like for my grandmother in 1929 at the beginning of the depression, no job, no income, no training, to have only been in the city for three weeks when my grandfather died. They barely knew anyone. The funeral director took pity on her and provided funeral services. She promised to pay them back for their kindness and although it took thirty years, Grandma paid her debt, (I believe to the son of the funeral director that had cared for her.) She was totally unprepared to find herself in these circumstances. But my grandmother knew only one thing to do – pray and look to God for his help. She knew to trust God in spite of the circumstances and to obey God in spite of the challenges and to see to it that the faith she had was passed on to her children. She knew it was the most important thing she could do. Ultimately it was the only thing that mattered!

Thank God for godly mothers and grandmothers that in spite of the struggles made sure they passed the faith on to their children and grandchildren. Thank God for those women who may have had to do it all alone, but they made sure they passed a living and life changing faith to their sons and daughters. Eight children of Melvin and Fannie Cox and in spite of challenges and bumps along the way, she imparted that faith and all eight of them knew Jesus as Savior and Lord of their lives when they left this world.

I know this is a challenging time but Mom let me ask you, and Dad too, are you living a life of faith yourself and are you imparting to your children a faith that will carry them through the present struggles and whatever they will face in the future? It's the best thing to do. It's the most important thing to do. It's the only thing to do.

I'm grateful my great, great grandmother didn't decide that since God allowed her husband to die in the Civil War she would forget God and just live her life the way she wanted. Instead, she guarded the faith that had been entrusted to her and passed it on to her children, to her son, my great-grandfather. I'm glad my grandmother didn't decide that life and God had been unfair to her and just tell the kids, "It doesn't matter if you serve God or not, after all, he doesn't care, he let your daddy die. Just live your life the way you want." Instead, my grandmother told them, "Children, stay close to Jesus for if you miss heaven, you've missed it all."

Like Timothy, perhaps you were raised to serve God. Your grandmother, your mother passed that faith on to you. Someone lived the life before you but somewhere along the way perhaps you stopped guarding that deposit of faith they imparted to you. You decided to take a detour and that's a tragedy in and of itself. But there is another tragedy and that is what happens to your children. Who is passing the faith on to them? We have a responsibility to share the story of Jesus and his grace with the next generation. The eternal destiny of the next generation, our children and grandchildren, rests with us.

For this reason, for someone today, I'm telling you, God intended for you to have a different life than the one you've been pursuing. It's time, for your sake, for your children's sake, for the sake of that grandmother and mother that passed the faith to you - it's time to come home. Come back to Jesus. It's time to look back and remember and then come back to that sincere faith that was first in your grandmother, and then in your mother, and then in you. It's time. Today is the day. Now.

You can argue about why or why not. Listen once again to what Paul tells Timothy. **“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it...” 2 Timothy 3:14**

You know those from whom you learned this way of faith. You know the rock from which you were cut. You know they were the real thing. They prayed for you. They were counting on you serving God and guarding that faith so that the next generation, their grandchildren or great grandchildren, or great – great whatever generation it might be, that they would know God and continue to serve him.

A sincere faith Paul called it. That's what has been imparted to you. What will you do now? Your decision may determine your eternal destination. And that of your children. What will you do? It's not too late for you to make that choice to trust God in spite of the circumstances, to obey God in spite of the challenges and to not only keep the faith but to pass it on to the next generation. Let's pray.

“May the Lord bless you and keep you, May the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up his countenance upon and give you peace.”