

"As I Have Loved You...."

John 13:31-35

May 9, 2004

Today we celebrate Mother's Day. It is an important occasion - even though it is not a particularly religious holiday. And even though my intent is to talk about God and the Gospel this morning but I would like to attack it by first talking about motherhood. I hope that I can enlist some brave souls to answer a simple question for me. The question is this: What is it that mothers do?

*There was a wonderful article that I read this week about the importance of traditional 'mothering' practices. It talked about the far reaching impact of what mothers do. It said: "**Although Mother's Day is usually a purely sentimental occasion, the hard science of neurobiology has now confirmed the importance of mothers. The most basic maternal activities have a profound impact on the development of the baby's brain. Since time immemorial, mothers have done little natural things like rocking the baby, looking at the baby while nursing or changing their diapers, tickling them, playing peek-a-boo, and imitating all their little baby noises. Science now knows that activities like these develop our basic capacity for sociability and connection. The freedom and security of society ultimately depend on most of the mothers and babies doing these things together.**"*

It amazed me that the author could make such a bold claim as to say that the very freedom and security of our society is tied to parents playing peek-a-boo with their children. I believe that it is true but I was surprised to read it. At the very heart of who we are as individuals [and as a society] is the love and acceptance that we experience growing up. And I say thank you to all of the mothers and fathers - the aunts and uncles - older brothers and sisters and neighbors and friends that take seriously the job of tickling and smiling, rocking and hugging.

There was another article that suggested the importance of that same attentiveness but approached it from a negative directions. It was something written by a well known and loved American icon. Listen to what he wrote first - then I will tell you the author. He said: "A small child waits with impatience the arrival home of a parent. She wishes to relate some sandbox experience. She is excited to share the thrill that she has known that day. The time comes; the parent arrives. Beaten down by he stresses of the workplace the parent often replies: "Not now, honey, I'm busy, go watch television." The most often spoken words in the American household today are the words: go watch television. If not now, when? Later. But later never comes for many and the

parent fails to communicate at the very earliest of ages. We give her designer clothes and computer toys, but we do not give her what she wants the most, which is our time. Now, she is fifteen and has a glassy look in her eyes. Honey, do we need to sit down and talk? Too late. Love has passed by." The person who wrote these words was Robert Keeshan, better known as Captain Kangaroo.

How very important the job of parenting - mothering & fathering is. It shapes our lives as from our very beginnings we find that we are important and lovable – or we come to believe that we are not. And those beliefs shape our lives.

Jesus turns to His disciples as He approaches the time when He will be with them no longer - at least physically. He turns to them as a loving parent, addressing them as "little children". And He says: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you - you also should love one another."

There are at least two things that seem critically important to note as we listen to these words of Jesus. The first is that this love of God has existed from the beginning. It has come to us from before our first breath. It is a love that we have received quite apart from our actions or inability to act. Like a mother cuddling her helpless infant child, gazing intently at the child with deep love, so God's love enfolds us from the beginning. And it can shape our lives.

Secondly, it is a commandment. This is not a suggestion about how we should interact if we happen to get around to it. It is a command of Jesus that we love one another.

To often we think that love is just an emotion that happens to us. If we get that emotional feeling - aren't we lucky. But if we don't happen to feel loving we think that there is nothing we can do about it. Someone wrote about these things in an interesting way. He said (Philip Gulley, For Everything a Season)

"I want to tell you a lie! Hate is an emotion we can't help. Hate is a feeling we cannot overcome. If we hate someone, it is because we just can't help ourselves. We're human. We have no choice but to hate. That is a lie. Unfortunately, it is a lie many people believe. They believe this lie in order to excuse their hatred. After all, if we can't help but hate, if hate is a feeling we simply cannot help, then hatred is never our fault, is it? But we can help it. Hatred is a choice. We choose to hate, just as we choose to love. Oh, I know, there are people out there who believe love isn't a choice, that love is primarily an emotion, a feeling, a stirring in the loins. Love is a matter of the will - something we decide to do. Love is a choice."

Jesus commands His followers to love, not as an emotional state that we fall into - but as an act of will that we choose. Choose to love one another - it can shape your life.

One last point that I would like to make from today's gospel text. Without a doubt when Jesus speaks of love it is an all inclusive love. In the words of Jesus we find the call to

love both our neighbors and our enemies. But this word is address in a very special way to His disciples – the followers of Christ - the church - us! We in this room are commanded by Jesus to love each other. It is to be the hallmark by which the world knows us. If it is true that a society can trace its freedom and security to the nurture and love that exists between parent and child I have no trouble extending that a step and saying that the church in general and our congregation in specific will rise and fall in connection to the love that we have and live out for each other - a love that comes as a choice because Christ has first loved us.

We give thanks today for the love of mothers for their children. And for the love which we have received from our God. Let us live in that love and love one another!

AMEN