

“Like My Mama Used to Say”

Acts 7:59-60; 1 Peter 2:6-8; John 14:1-6, 11-14

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As I’ve mentioned on *numerous* occasions in the past, I am a ‘lectionary preacher.’ I use as the basis for my weekly messages the passages listed in the *“Revised Common Lectionary,”* which many of my colleagues, Catholic and Protestant, make use of. As you are likely aware, each week it offers 4 readings... one each from the O.T., the Psalms, an Epistle, and the Gospels. I like this in part because every week in this 3-year cycle I get to consider how my perspective on a particular set of Scriptures has CHANGED in those ‘short’ 3 years. Bears witness to the truth that ***“God’s mercies are new every morning”***... esp. SUNDAY morning...

The challenge for me, however, is to have to CHOOSE which ones to consider. Like for instance... THIS morning! First, we have Peter’s ‘foundational’ truth about Christ being a ***“Precious cornerstone... one the builders rejected.”*** (1 Peter 2:6-7) Sounds like one that could *perhaps* be significant to the LC church right now, with its little ‘project’ out on Corbina Road...

Then there is the passage from Acts which describes that historic event of the church’s first martyr, Stephen, and his prayers to God to ***“receive my spirit,”*** and his plea to God to ***“not hold this sin against them.”*** (Acts 7:59-60) Hmm... sound familiar to another innocent man’s pleas to HIS God as He too was put to death?

And thirdly, there are some other words of that ‘man’... aka, JESUS... that should NEVER be ‘erased’ from the ‘heart drive’ of our LIFE in Christ. Indelible statements like ***“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe (trust) in God, believe also in me.”*** (John 14:1) That by that trust, we must boldly ask, and we ***“will do (even) greater works”*** than Christ... you know, the One who made that ‘fairly’ significant statement: ***“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.”*** (John 14:6) All THREE of these passages offer significant statements of God’s love and wisdom... ‘truth’ to help us find our ‘way’ in ‘life’...

As I grappled with the choice of which ‘voice’ to listen to within this ‘great cloud of witnesses,’ I also thought about the ‘backdrop’ to which these Scriptures play out. MOTHER’S DAY. For a big part of why we honor mothers on this day is because of the legacy of **wisdom** and **love** that they have handed down to countless generations. Those ‘voices of truth’ that often went far under-appreciated. Was theirs always a *perfect* wisdom and love? NO. Just like two of

these three Biblical messengers, by NO means 'perfect'. About the same way that you and I live out the wisdom and love of God 'perfectly'...

So, on this day of celebration of the multitude of 'good gifts' that many mothers... and GRANDmothers... have passed along to their loved ones, let us look at a number of these timeless truths of God through their eyes... or lips. In the same way that parents, both female and male, have attempted to instill in their children Godly character and faith, let us consider statements from the 'fount of all wisdom.' The ONLY 'perfect Parent,' if you will. Maybe listening a 'little' better than we did as children. May God's Words, through human messengers, be heard by us today just as clear and genuine as if spoken to us **"Like our Mamas used to say..."**

First of all, our mothers, and fathers for that matter, wanted our lives to be built on solid 'foundations.' Get a good education. Follow good examples. Live by high moral standards. That in living by such exemplary values, one would not bring 'shame' to the family name. But, if we strayed from those family 'rules'... some clearly articulated, some not, yet still understood... there would be 'consequences' for our disobedience. 'Consequences.' Not a popular word in current culture...

How much more seriously do we give thought to how our behavior reflects on the 'family name' that matters most: Jesus Christ. As Christians, we are to build on the foundation, the example, of Christ. We can be assured that as we believe, trust in that chosen and precious name of Jesus, we **"will not be put to shame."** But, that same 'living stone' holds us to standards that we can readily trip over. 'We ALL sin and FALL short.' In Peter's words, **"They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do."** (1 Peter 2:8) It is 'inevitable' to get in trouble when we don't listen. Some things NEVER change...

Now, if there was ever a 'child' of God who DID listen, it was Stephen. His life sure bore witness to the statement that **"whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."** Well, maybe 'shamed' by that hostile lynch mob who threw stones at him. But to the One who mattered most... his Lord and God... there was certainly no shame. Indeed, as hard as it would have been to see him suffer physical death, the Father no doubt received His faithful servant with open, loving, proud arms. Not only because he exhibited great FAITH... but also, Stephen displayed that characteristic most like the Jesus He loved and admired, both in word and deed...

FORGIVENESS. How many of us, in the midst of being stoned to death by a hateful, abusive crowd, could have uttered those words: *“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”* (Acts 7:60) Words he said as his dying breath...or, as one translation says, as he *“fell asleep.”* Perhaps this speaks to the way that he would have been received into God’s arms... in peace and rest.

How many of us wayward children, having acted in anger toward our mother, perhaps even casting ‘stones’ of hurtful words, have been met with similar acts of forgiveness? Have we not learned the value of ‘sleeping’ on that for which anger and bitterness would be our natural response? Have we heard parental advice that ‘getting even’ doesn’t really do so ... that the injury isn’t any LESS.... That when we hold something against another, in truth we’re holding it up ‘against’ ourselves?

Stephen, in praying to God to *“receive (commend) my spirit”*... in asking God to ‘forgive them’ (because they ‘knew not what they did?’)... is certainly pointing to his Lord Jesus’ ‘example’ of how to live... and, how to die. In some ways, perhaps fulfilling those words of Jesus we read earlier: *“the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do...”* (John 14:12) Stephen showed the same sort of fruit of the Spirit, forgiveness, that Jesus did. But what about the next statement? *“In fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.”* (John 14:12) How could Stephen, or any other follower of Christ, past, present, or future... do ‘GREATER’ works than Christ? Not possible, right? Perhaps what Jesus is saying here is that those who will follow Him will have the ability to reach a ‘greater’ number of people, will have greater ‘opportunities’ to spread the Good News of the Gospel than did that ‘one solitary life’ of Jesus.

In speaking of ‘Good News’ whom would we consider the greatest ‘evangelist’... that ‘bringer of good news’... of our modern era? Probably **Billy Graham**. Why? Well, of course, first and foremost because he was, as Stephen was described, *“a man of God’s grace and power.”* (Acts 6:8) BUT, also because he had tools at his disposal like sports stadiums and television. Certainly MUCH ‘greater’ opportunities to spread the Gospel than Jesus or Paul ever had. Hundreds of years earlier, the **Gutenberg printing press** could be considered the greatest single tool to evangelism developed to that point, in allowing the Bible to be mass produced and, therefore, be made more readily available to the ‘masses’ ... or, ‘messes’...

And yet, you and I have something that Gutenberg, Billy Graham, not even Jesus had... GLOBAL communication. The 'world wide web.' We have at our fingertips [PHONE] resources that our ancestors in the faith never dreamed of. (Well, I'm not going to speak for JESUS...) Unlike the Great Apostle Paul, if we want to get a message of encouragement to our fellow church members, we don't have to wait *months* for a letter to get to them.... We can communicate in *seconds*! WHO KNOWS... maybe it was these very modern advancements that Jesus was thinking about when He said that His followers **"will do greater works than these"** that He had done. Perhaps in the same way that our mothers, and fathers, assured their children, and their children's children, that they could accomplish even greater things than they had... if they would simply make the best use of all that they have been given....

It is this same sort of assurance of the ability of His beloved ones to accomplish great goals that lead Jesus to say to His disciples **"You know the way to the place where I am going."** (*John 14:4*) Jesus tells his friends this 'place' that I am going ahead of you to prepare... all these rooms in the mansion that awaits you... you KNOW how to get there. Of course, then Thomas... good ol' 'Doubting Thomas'... verbalizes what in reality was likely on the minds of many of his fellow disciples—**"How can we know the way?"** (*John 14:5*) (Does anybody but me see a similarity between this question and the insightful one of Pontius Pilate: **"Truth? What IS 'truth?'"**) Jesus doesn't hesitate in his response: 'Tommy, you KNOW the way. You know ME. I am the way. I am truth. I am life. Follow me, and I'll take you home. Home to that place where you are loved in ways like no other.'

My friends, in comparing the love and wisdom of a mother with that of the 'saints of the faith' that have gone before us... especially that of the only perfect One, Jesus Christ... I know that there can be as much CONTRAST, as many DIFFERENCES, as there are similarities. Some of you may have come from places where your biological parent failed *miserably* at being a Godly influence in your life. In many of the ways that we ourselves can fail in our OWN attempts to be a good parent, a good friend, a good witness to Christ's love.

But let us not dwell on the ways we, or those generations before us, may have fallen short. (As in 'ALL fall short...') Instead, let us look to the GOOD that we have gained from our family relationships. Let us focus on the ways that our mothers and fathers, and others, have

attempted to impart wisdom... to show love. Knowing that the only PERFECT wisdom and love is from GOD.

Just as we, as children, would want to come to our mothers when we were hurt, or fearful, or confused, let us do so today as adults to our Heavenly Father... who loves us with the tenderness of a mother. As we face the trials of this current day... where we face illness of our body, fears in our heart and confusion in our minds... may we know that our brother Jesus is right there. Just as He was for Thomas. Just as a loving parent assures their child that 'all is well'... that they will 'find their way'.. so too is our Lord to reassure us that ***"You know the way."***

How can we be so sure? Simply by trusting in His opening words:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. [You] Believe in God, believe also in me." (John 14:1)

No matter how comforting and encouraging our mothers may or may not have been, our God's love will never fail. Trust in him so that your hearts may not be troubled...

Affirmation of Faith

"One Solitary Life"

James Allen Francis

As I pondered today's message,
mindful of how our lives can be so impacted by one person...
a mother, a grandfather, or someone not even related...
I thought about the One who is to influence us the MOST is our Lord Jesus Christ.
Just 'one solitary life' who has impacted lives like no other.

That term reminded me of a reading I remember from my youth...

This is a popular poem about the life of Jesus Christ.
Although the author is frequently cited as "unknown,"
the poem is actually attributed to James Allen Francis.

Born in Nova Scotia, Canada, he became a pastor at age twenty-one,
his first pastorate being in New York City. He served in ministry for the remainder of his life,
dying at age 64. Perhaps 'old' by the Beatles standards, but as I can attest to,
MUCH younger these days.

I invite you to join me in using Rev. Francis' words as our Affirmation of Faith:

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant.
He grew up in another village, where he worked in a carpenter shop
until he was 30. Then, for three years, he was an itinerant preacher.

He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family
or owned a home. He didn't go to college. He never lived in a big city.
He never traveled 200 miles from the place where he was born. He did none of the things that
usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself.

He was only 33 when the tide of public opinion turned against him.
His friends ran away. One of them denied him. He was turned over to his enemies and went
through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross
between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled
for his garments, the only property he had on earth. When he was dead,
he was laid in a borrowed grave, through the pity of a friend.

Twenty centuries have come and gone, and today
he is the central figure of the human race. All the armies that ever marched,
all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat,
all the kings that ever reigned--put together--have not affected the life of man
on this earth as much as that one, solitary life.

As we consider the value and impact of our own lives,
let us remember the impact of that one single life of Jesus Christ.