

Sermon 051417

Our Cornerstone

I am sure that most of you are aware that today is Mothers' Day. Mothers' Day is not a Christian Feast Day in the Church calendar, but the day is celebrated in the church. A priest was once approached before the church service on the second Sunday in May by a woman who said, "I have brought my mother to church with me today. Father, I don't care what you talk about in your sermon, but it better be about mothers and it better be good." I have a suspicion that there be some of that sentiment in this room today. It is good though to take a day to honor our mothers, even though for most of us in this room, we will be honoring the memory of our mother.

Honor thy father and thy mother, the fifth Commandment. The first four Commandments are of a more cosmic nature and deal directly with the covenant between us and our Creator and Redeemer, and they call upon us to place God's honor above anything else. The fifth Commandment calls upon us to take that same approach toward those whom we owe for our earthly life. To honor them is to recognize that we wouldn't be here without father and mother. Of course there may be some parents who really don't deserve to be honored, but this command is not about deserving; to honor father and mother is to realize that life is not our own, but is a gift. This honor, freely given to our parents, is that part of our family relationship that binds us together regardless of petty grievances and feelings.

Committed family relationships are the things that hold our society together. Today is the day that we honor our mothers.

Mothers have been honored for centuries by various civilizations, but the holiday that we celebrate today began in 1908 in Grafton, West Virginia. A young woman named Anna Jarvis remembered a Sunday School lesson her mother had taught where she said, "I hope and pray that someone, sometime, will found a memorial mothers' day. There are many days for men, but none for mothers." Anna loved her mother and took these words seriously. She began lobbying prominent businessmen like John Wanamaker of Philadelphia and politicians including Presidents Taft and Roosevelt. In 1914, Anna's hard work paid off when President Woodrow Wilson signed a bill recognizing Mother's Day as a national holiday.

At first, people observed Mother's Day by attending church with their mothers and writing letters and spending time with them. Soon, though, the honor given to mothers was invaded by crass commercial interests. With the encouragement of the florists, card companies, and department stores, people began sending flowers, cards, and presents on Mother's Day. Mother's Day has evolved into a multi-billion dollar business with more people dining out and making phone calls that day than any other day of the year. Anna Jarvis was furious at the commercialization of her holiday and felt that the spirit of the day was being corrupted by greed and profit. In 1923, she filed a lawsuit to stop a Mother's Day festival, and was even arrested for disturbing the peace at a convention selling carnation for a mothers group. Before

her death in 1948, Anna Jarvis confessed that she was sorry that she ever started the Mother's Day tradition.

However, Mother's Day is now one of the most commercially successful American occasions, having become the most popular day of the year to dine out at a restaurant in the United States with six out of ten Americans dining at a restaurant on Mothers' Day. Also, Mothers' Day generates a significant portion of the U.S. jewelry industry's annual revenue, from custom gifts like mother's rings. Americans spend approximately \$2.6 billion on flowers, \$1.53 billion on pampering gifts—like spa treatments—and another \$68 million on the 140 million greeting cards sent to mothers. Mothers' Day is the 3rd biggest holiday in the United States with more than \$7 billion spent on gifts and meals.

Anna Jarvis believed that people could be brought together by appealing to that love and respect that everyone has for their mother. A mother's love and the love that we have for our mothers is a powerful love, but not nearly as powerful as the love that we find in our Gospel reading this morning. John 14 is part of what is known as Jesus' farewell discourse. Jesus is preparing his disciples for his departure. Today's Gospel reading is one of the most read in the entire Bible, especially at funerals. The disciples are confused and lost. Jesus is telling his disciples that he is going away, to his Father's house. Previously, when Jesus had spoken of his Father's house, he was referring to the Temple. Now, he is speaking of a new and wonderful house, and he is assuring them that there is a place for them. Thomas is confused. *Lord, we do not*

know where you are going. How can we know the way? Jesus answers: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." There is a break in the clouds of confusion and fear, and Thomas sees the one who will show him the way.

Professor J.I. Packer says of this passage, "The words 'the way,' 'the truth,' and 'the life,' were not words randomly strung together by our Lord. Rather they represent three critical strands of biblical teaching that are found in both the Old and New Testaments." Jesus' use of the term "the way," reminds us Jesus' words that we heard last Sunday in Chapter 10 of John's Gospel. *So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. Hebrews 10:19-20: Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh).*

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks of two roads or two ways, one of which leads to destruction and death. *'Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.* The way that Jesus speaks of is the way of love – love of God and love of neighbor. *Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you*

shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” The second is this, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.’ The way of Jesus is the path to the Father, a path of love that leads to an abundant and eternal life in a living relationship with the living God.

The *truth* refers to all that God has revealed of himself especially in his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Remember in John, Chapter 18, when during Jesus’ trial Pontius Pilate asked, “What is truth?” Jesus is the truth incarnate, the Word made flesh. We experience this truth in teaching, preaching, and living in the light of the Gospel. Ephesians 1:13: *In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; Jesus is the totality of God’s revelation concerning himself. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,*

The *life* refers to that living and eternal relationship with the living God. John 17:3: Jesus said *And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.* It is through faith in Jesus that this life is available to everyone who believes. John has recorded these promises of Jesus. *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomsoever he wishes. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.*

Jesus' words are quite clear; he is the way, the truth, and the life. He is the only way to the Father. Jesus is the promised Messiah, the focal point of all creation and all history. Ephesians 1:10: *God has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.* According to Bishop Tom Wright it isn't just John's Gospel that you lose if you deny that Jesus is the only way to the Father, you lose the whole of Christianity. The belief that all religions are really the same sounds nice and democratic, but that belief denies that the God of Israel has acted decisively in the world to bring Israel's story to its proper goal and to rescue the world.

The Bible says: *For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." To you then who believe, he is precious;* We thank you Lord that you sent Jesus to be our chief cornerstone, but on this day that we also honor our mothers let us close with this prayer written by Peter Marshall: "On this day of sacred memories, our Father, we would thank Thee for our mothers who gave us life, who surrounded us early and late with love and care, whose prayers on our behalf still cling around the Throne of Grace, a haunting perfume of love's petitions. "Help us, their children, to be more worthy of their love. So, in the days ahead, may our love speak to the hearts of those who know love best—by kindness, by compassion, by simple courtesy and daily thoughtfulness. "Bless her whose name we whisper before Thee, and keep her in Thy perfect peace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."