**6 Easter**

**May 8, 2016**

**Mothers’ Day**

**In the name of the God of all Creation,**

**The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,**

**And the power of God known in the Spirit.**

**Amen.**

Happy Mothers’ Day. This is a special day set aside to honor our mothers … and traditionally we do so in person, or we give a call … maybe even Skype. And we send cards or flowers, take them out to brunch or dinner. For some of us, our mothers have passed away so we remember them with or memories … and it gives us an opportunity for reflection.

Now, I think it is safe to say that most of us have committed faux pas in our life that seem to scar us forever. You know, those things we said or did that were embarrassing and we wish we could have a do-over. Well, one of my Mothers’ Day sermons was like that, and I’ve been tentative about preaching about Mothers’ Day ever since. You see, I once preached a Mothers’ Day sermon about how Mothers’ Day was really an invention of Hallmark Cards, the flower industry, and restaurant owners. It was one of those faux pas that stick is engraved in my mind … and it was in front of a very full congregation. The point I was trying to make is you don’t just honor your mother one day a year on Mothers’ Day, but you should honor your mother every day of the year.

However, the day I preached that sermon Dorothy Ebert … God bless her soul … was sitting right in front of the pulpit, with her daughter and son-in-law and grandchildren in tow to take her out to a Mothers’ Day brunch following church, and Dorothy was wearing a big corsage and holding Mothers’ Day cards from her daughter and grandchildren. The image of her sitting there is like a digital photo stuck in my mind’s archive … and I can’t get it out of my head. Dorothy was not pleased with the opening of my sermon with its cynical thoughts about the invention of Mothers’ Day … and she never heard another word of my sermon after that. Her scowl let me know her displeasure as I preached … her words after the service were even more stinging. Ever since I’ve had a fear about preaching on Mothers’ Day.

Anyhow, with that in mind … here goes.

First of all, there are few more emotional bonds that are greater than that of a mother and child.  And while most of us know that difficult circumstances, undesirable behaviors, or other problems do arise between parents and children, we've all had the need for the nurturing love of a mother. That is the real reason why, in spite of Hallmark and the floral industry and the restaurant owners it is a proper and appropriate thing to set aside a day to honor our mothers.

So, in special honor of our mothers, I suggest instead of **just** taking your mother to brunch, or buying her a corsage or sending her a flower arrangement, you share a special gift with her by making a donation to an organization serving children like the Boys and Girls Club, or a program that works with teen moms like St. Gerard’s Campus, or a shelter for victims of domestic violence like Betty Griffin House. We can honor our mothers but honoring and protecting motherhood and all mothers.

Now, one of the reasons I thought I’d take the risk of preaching about Mothers’ Day is this story that I recently found. It is about a friend’s great grandmother who gave birth to a daughter that was my friend’s grandmother. This friend never knew her great grandmother, but the story was passed down through the family, and it became part of the families cultural values.

In 1915 Aaron Cohen and Minnie Golub, both Russian immigrants, lived in the same five-story tenement house on Mercer Street in New York's Lower East Side. Although they knew each other only by sight they had not really met since a formal introduction was the respected custom for Jewish Russian immigrants 100 years ago. But after some prodding Aaron's sister dutifully introduced them.

At ages 25 and 24, Aaron and Minnie were the oldest single children in their families. Many around them wondered "What are they waiting for?" as most of their peers were already married. But once the spark was ignited they courted, had a wonderful wedding in the Jewish Russian tradition, and within a few months Minnie was.

There were no unusual problems with Minnie's pregnancy, but it was it decided she would not deliver at home in their apartment. A century ago there were maternity hospitals just for giving birth and Minnie went to the East Broadway Lying-In Hospital a week before her expected due date. Minnie was placed in a bright and airy ward which she shared with seven other women.

Two of the women had already delivered their babies but, as was the custom in those days, they stayed on just to be certain all was well.  Minnie, at 25, was the oldest of all the young women in her ward.  The two youngest were 16 and 17, one of whom had a complicated pregnancy. That girl was two weeks past her due date, hurting and afraid.

Early the next morning the sleeping women were jolted awake by screams.  Two nurses rushed in and wheeled the 17-year-old girl off.  The others were silent, filled with fear and they looked to their "new big sister" Minnie for comfort.

After 45-minutes punctuated by painful moans, horrific shrieks, and a brief chilling silence, there was a baby's yelp.  The women in the ward gave a collective sigh of relief. Then a nurse came rushing in to Minnie's beside and whispered that the young mother died after delivering her baby … a healthy little girl.

Minnie reluctantly told the other young women about the mother’s death … they were understandably paralyzed with shock and those who had yet to give birth were very anxious. But Minnie ended her news-telling with a plan for a breast-feeding system for the hungry newborn. The next night was when Minnie gave birth to her own baby … my friend’s grandmother Rose.

News of Rose’s birth spread to out-of-town family by way of telegram … many of Minnie and Aaron’s family did not have phones in 1916.  The next morning, with telegram and sack lunch in hand, Minnie's cousin Hannah took the ferry from New Jersey to pay a visit. When Hannah entered the ward room she saw two babies at Minnie's bed … one suckling at Minnie’s breast … and the other crying in a bassinet next to Minnie’s bed.

Cousin Hannah said, "Minnie, the telegram didn't say twins!"  Minnie chuckled and then teared up, and she told the story of the young mother who died in childbirth. Hannah looked at the nursing baby, then briefly examined the crying creature in the bassinet, and said, pointing to the baby at Minnie's breast, "Well, your baby is far prettier."

"Oh, that one is mine," laughed Minnie, pointing to the crying one.

"You leave your own to cry while you feed a stranger's baby?" Hannah whispered.

Minnie replied, "Yes. This is a baby with no mother … and maybe no home. My baby can cry for a few minutes. She has both."

She motioned to her cousin to come a little closer as she looked around the room. "This baby needs food and nurture, but I’m also doing this to also be an example for the other girls.  If we think just of ourselves and our own babies, not only will others needlessly suffer, but so will our own. We all need someone else at times. I think this is good practice for being a good mother."

Hannah understood. Minnie's philosophy was simple. Care for your own, but care about others, too. Minnie believed we are all connected in some way under God's watchful eye, but we are obligated to take action to help others. The gifts we give reward the receiver and giver both.

This story shaped the lives and values of her whole family, as had events in her family long before shaped Minnie’s values. Mothers’ Day is not just about your own mother … or just about you. Mothers’ Day is about all mothers … mothers in generations past that have shaped our families and our values … and mothers today … all mothers whether they be biological mothers, or foster mothers, or adoptive mothers.

So, in special honor of our mothers, I suggest instead of just taking your mother to brunch, or buying her a corsage or sending her a flower arrangement, that you share a special gift with an organization serving children, or a program that works with teen mothers who are at risk, or a shelter for victims of domestic violence. Or, if your mother is only a blessed memory, perhaps you could visit a mother whose children are too far away for them to visit … they just might like a card and some flowers.

Happy Mothers’ Day!

Amen.