

May 10, 2020

Mother's Day 2020

A Mother's Influence

John 2:1-11

Opening words: The history of the American Mother's Day can be traced back to the death of Anna Reese Jarvis in 1905. Her daughter, Anna M. Jarvis, did not want her to be forgotten, so she campaigned for the creation of an official Mother's Day. She dreamed of having a day when all mothers would be honored. She began by petitioning the superintendent of her church, the St. Andrew's Methodist Church, in Grafton, West Virginia. Her mother had spent over twenty years there teaching Sunday school in that church. Her request was granted and the first Mother's Day celebration was held, 112 years ago today, on May 10, 1908. Four hundred and seven people attended. Anna Jarvis arranged for white carnations — her Mother's favorite flower — to adorn the patrons. Two carnations were given to every mother in attendance. By 1909, forty-six different states were observing Mother's Day. In 1912, West Virginia became the first state to officially observe Mother's Day. In 1914, Woodrow Wilson signed into law the national observance of Mother's Day. Mother's Day is great, but it is not isolated to America.

Mother's Day is celebrated around the world on a variety of dates, using a variety of names. Let me give you a few examples. In Great Britain it is called Mothering Sunday. In former Soviet bloc countries, it is called International Women's Day, which is celebrated on March 8. In the Arab world, Mother's Day is observed on March 21, the first day of spring in the northern hemisphere. In Argentina, Mother's Day is celebrated on the third Sunday in October. In Armenia, it is celebrated on April 7 and is called Maternity and Beauty Day. In Paraguay, it is observed on May 15, their Independence Day. The United States is one of the eighty-five countries who observe Mother's Day on the second Sunday of May. This is the point. People around the world recognize the importance of motherhood.

Before I continue, I want to make a confession. I write over fifty sermons a year, but this is the one that I struggle with the most. I do not struggle because I had a terrible mother. I struggle because I had a good mother. She died years ago, and I still struggle with her death. I miss her more now than I did on the day she died. It is only now that I am truly beginning to appreciate her. She really had quite a story. Our Gospel reading in this Mother's Day is John 2:1-11. Let me call this message *A Mother's Influence*.

John 2:1-11 ¹ On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

⁴ "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

⁶ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

⁸ Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, ⁹ and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰ and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

¹¹ What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

We find ourselves today in the second chapter of John. This story is only found in the gospel of John. It cannot be found in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. However, that fact does not diminish the importance of this story. Everyone knows the story of Jesus' first miracle. The scene is a wedding reception. Couples in Jesus' day did not go on honeymoons. No one traveled to Mexico, the Caribbean or Hawaii. Instead, they stayed at home and held receptions that lasted approximately a week. That is a lot of partying, I am glad I did not have to pay for that reception.

According to the story, Jesus was invited to one of these week-long receptions. I would like to say his invitation came because Jesus was fun. This is the truth. His invitation came because Jesus was a respected rabbi. It is while Jesus is at this reception that the unthinkable happens. The wine runs out. The hosts of the reception are devastated and look for someone to blame. Mary did not look for the guilty, Mary looked at Jesus. She knew Jesus had the power to save the day. She believed in Jesus when Jesus did not believe in himself. She knew it was time for Jesus to get started. God had a special plan for her son. This was the problem is, Jesus was not ready. In verse four, we find Jesus making an excuse for his inactivity, "*My time has not yet come.*" Mary does not listen. Instead, she instructs servants to bring him water. By the end of the scene, the party has resumed, and everyone is happy. Everyone had enough wine. Verse ten tells us, it was good wine. What does that mean? It means the wine Jesus produced had a kick.

Today, I do not want to talk about wine. I want to talk about the important role of motherhood. You know the truth. Motherhood does not end when the child starts school or learns how to drive. Motherhood is a never-ending job. Motherhood always has unfinished business. Look at the story. Jesus was thirty years old and he still needed his mother. Do not fool yourself, regardless of your children's age or station, your children still need you. I have wrapped my thoughts about motherhood around three thoughts. Mary models each one in our story. However, these words are not just isolated to mothers. They are useful in all relationships. If you are ready to begin, say, "**Amen!**" This is my first statement.

Mothers encourage their children! Jesus is thirty years old in the scripture lesson for today, but he still needed to be encouraged. The Master was hesitant, but Mary encouraged him to do it. Encouragement is something mothers do best. Mothers encourage their children to take their first step, and mothers have encouraged their children to start their own business or get that advanced degree. The world is always telling us that we are not good enough. When you encourage someone, you are saying, "I believe in you." Does anyone here need a word of encouragement? When was the last time you encouraged someone? Mothers encourage their children! This is my second statement.

Mothers prepare their child to survive in this world! Mary had an unfair advantage. She had all the memories of Jesus' birth tucked away in her heart and mind. She knew Jesus was called to be more than a carpenter. Do not ever look at the child in your life and believe they have arrived. Our children are like us, evolving into something new. I grow weary of people who tell of their children's past failures and difficulties. I am sure they could have done better in school. I am sure they could have been more respectful during those teenage years. I am sure their divorce brought shame on the whole family. Let me give you some pastoral advance, move forward! Let those past things stay in the past. Look at the people in your life and envision their future. Everyone has the right to tap into their potential and evolve into something new. When you look at your children, do you just look back? When you look at your children, do you look to the future? Mothers prepare their children to survive in this world! This is my third statement.

Mothers prepare their children for eternity! We are constantly reminded we are in the middle of a great pandemic. The numbers are not pretty. Over 258,000 have died around the world from complication caused by the coronavirus. Over 72,000 have died in the United States from complication caused by the coronavirus. Those numbers will grow. Everyone is talking about a cure. No one is talking about the salvation of those who have died. I do not want to sound negative, but that takes the grieving to a new level. Heaven would change if one person were missing. Heaven would change if one loved one was missing. How could you enjoy heaven if one of your children were missing? Mothers prepare their children for eternity!

I hope you do not misunderstand me. I am not talking about bullet points on an agenda. They are not three things that need to be completed. They are three themes that are built into the fabric of the relationship between a mother and her children. These three things must be part of the core values in every Christian mother. The great wiseman Solomon (990 BCE–931 BCE) said it best in Proverbs 22:6, "*Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it.*" I know that is true because that is my story.

My mother's name was Ruth. She was raised in Brooklyn, New York. The oldest of two daughters to Walter and Nina Milligan. She attended P.S. 92 and graduated from

Erasmus Hall High School. At that time, young women were encouraged to stay at home and not continue their education. She did not listen. During the dark days of the Second World War she went to Pratt Institute and studied dietetics. After graduation, it was assumed she would live with her parents, but she did not listen. Instead, she moved to Jersey City, New Jersey and worked in a hospital. After working long days, she went back to school at night to work on her master's degree. However, she never got that degree.

One night everything changed. On that night, the work and the studies were placed to the side and she attended a social gathering at the Marble Collegiate Church. The Second World War had just ended, and dances were held so returning soldiers could meet single young women. She met a young dark-haired and complexed man from Ohio. He was an art student at the New York City School of Interior Design. At first, she was not interested in him because she thought he was Italian, which meant he was Catholic. She was suddenly interested in him when she found out he was Protestant. In time, they married, and they moved to Ohio. His job sent them to Warren. He always called her his Big City woman. In more time, they had three children, twin girls, and a boy. My mother had a career as a dietitian, but my sisters and I never questioned her priorities. We knew, we were her greatest priority. Nothing else really mattered. My mother was always encouraging. My mother was always preparing us for the future, both in this world and heaven.

When my father died in 1996, my mother did not do well. She stayed in their home, but she never adjusted to being alone. Family would visit from time to time. Occasionally, she would fly out to visit my sister, Janet, in Colorado. My other sister, Susan, and I went out to lunch with her every Wednesday. They were stressful lunches because my mother was on the decline. The same woman who had an independent spirit as a young adult had become paranoid. She felt like everyone was belittling her. In time, she left her home and moved to Copeland Oaks. At first, she had her own apartment. Then for a few days, she was in assisted living. The final step was the nursing home. She hated the Crandall Medical Center. She begged us to get her released. We had no other options, so she stayed.

It was early spring in 2002. She was not just unhappy. She was dying of a broken heart. My sister, Susan, and I did what we could. We were taking turns sitting with her so she would not be alone. One night, it was my turn and I sat in the shadows of her room. I knew I was sitting near her death bed. At first, I thought about my childhood, but then, as the hour grew late, I began to think of everything that had to happen the next day. I stood up and decided to leave. However, before I left, I leaned over and kissed her on her forehead. I said softly, "I love you." From some unknown power source she suddenly had a moment of clarity. She responded, "I hope so. I am your mother!" I am glad she was because she made me a better person. She would be the first one to admit it; she was not a perfect person. She made mistakes and she knew disappointment. However, I can testify today that she was a good mother, who taught

me life's most valuable lessons. She was always encouraging and always preparing us for the future, both in this world and in heaven. If you have ever experienced any positive from me, it is because of her. Solomon was not wrong. *"Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it."* That is how I remember her. How will you be remembered?