

## Christ-like Love

### **John 13:31-35**

Today is a special day – Mother’s Day. It is appropriate that we honor and salute our moms. It seems that mothers everywhere share some things in common. For example, they can chide us rather directly. See if some of these possible admonitions from biblical mothers ring a bell:

- Cain! Get off your brother. You’re going to kill him some day!
- Noah! No, you can’t keep them! I told you, don’t bring any more strays home!
- Abraham! Stop wandering around the countryside and get home for supper!
- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! Leave those clothes outside. You smell like a furnace!
- David! I told you not to play in the house with that sling! Go practice your harp. We pay good money for those lessons!

Some of us had moms like that. Some of us still do. We may be grownups now, but to your mother you are still fair game for correction. Several years ago, Knoxville, Tennessee police chief Phil Keith was attending a city council meeting, which was being televised on a local television channel. His pager went off and he was surprised to see it was his mother. Thinking something was wrong, he went out into the hallway and phoned her. His mom had been watching the meeting on TV. “Phil Keith, are you chewing gum?” she asked. “Yes ma’am.” He replied. “Well, it looks awful. Spit it out.” Keith did so and went back to his meeting.

Moms everywhere seem to share certain universal characteristics. One of them is to worry about their children regardless of age. A mother was concerned about her son going off to college. She wrote the following letter to the college president:

Dear Sir: My son has been accepted for admission to your college and soon he will be leaving me. I am writing to ask that you give your personal attention to the selection of his roommate. I want to be sure that his roommate is not the kind of person who uses foul language, tells off-color jokes, smokes, drinks, or chases after girls. I hope you will understand why I am appealing to you directly. You see, this is the first time my son will be away from home, except for the four years he spent in the United States Marine Corps.

Mothers tend to be the glue that holds the family together. In our case, now and again I would set sail on a six to eight month deployment, waving good-bye to Susan and our six children on the pier. Susan then became both mother and father and did a phenomenal job of raising our children. She truly is the glue that held our family together.

I am going to show my age here, but I remember a cartoon that appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* many years ago. It showed a young boy about five or six years old talking on the phone, saying, “Mom is visiting grandma. The twins and Roxie and Billie and Sally and the dog and me and Dad are all home alone.” The truth is that when mom is gone, we feel alone.

There are lots of ways to define mothers. But the greatest and most common characteristic is their love. That’s why today’s passage from John is so *apropos*. Time was running out for Jesus. In John’s Gospel he had just washed the disciple’s feet, an act of total servanthood. He had predicted that he would be betrayed, and Judas had left the Upper Room. Then John reports today’s passage. Time was short. Jesus needed to get the disciples back to basics. And nothing was more central to Jesus’ ministry than the message of love. In verse 34 he said, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

Jesus was taking the disciples beyond the law. The law required only that they not hurt one another. But Jesus’ new commandment required them to be actively involved in the lives of others, just as Jesus had been involved in their lives. For the follower of Jesus, love is the final proof of a transformed life.

As theologian Francis Schaeffer said, “if we do not show love to one another, then the world has a right to question whether Christianity is true.”

It is therefore appropriate to talk about love on Mother’s Day. Our first source of love is our parents. When we think of human love, we often think of Mom. When we think of Christ-like love exemplified in human form, we most often think of Mom. We are called to emulate Christ in the world. There are many aspects to Christ’s love. When he tells us to love one another as he has loved us, he is telling us to manifest love in the world in as many different ways as he does. Today I want to look at just two of the many characteristics of Christ’s love and how they are reflected to us through our mothers.

First, Christ-like love is a secure love. The apostle Paul tells us that love never fails [1 Corinthians 13:8]. All else may pass away, but not love. God’s love never lets go. Genuine love from mom and others never lets us go. We can rely on it. It will always be there. Even when mom is deceased, we still feel her love. My mother passed away 36 years away. I still know her love and I thank God for it.

Because all of our children are adopted, Susan and I have a special place in our hearts for adoptees. A parent’s love does not know biological boundaries. John Todd was born in Rutledge, Vermont into a family of several children in the early 1800s. When he was only six years old, both of his parents died. The relatives had to divide the children up and send them to live with different friends and relatives. One dear and loving aunt said she would take little John. The aunt sent a horse and a hired man named Caesar to fetch John and bring him to his new home. On the way there, this conversation took place:

John: Will she be there?

Caesar: Oh, yes, she’ll be there waiting up for you.

John: Will I like living with her?

Caesar: My, boy, you fallen into good hands.

John: Will she love me?

Caesar: Ah, she has a big heart.

John: Will I have my own room?

Caesar: She has everything set, and she has some surprises for you.

John: Do you think she will go to bed before we get there?

Caesar: Oh, no! She will wait up for you. When we get out of the woods, you will see her candle in the window.

When they emerged from the woods and saw the house, sure enough there was a candle burning in the window and she was standing in the doorway. As he jumped off the horse, she came to him, leaned down, kissed him, and said, “Welcome home, John.” She fed him supper, took him to his room, and waited until he fell asleep.

John Todd grew up to be a great preacher of the gospel. He always cherished his aunt and the life she gave him. And it always awed him that she was willing to give him a home and become a second mother to him. Years later, long after he had moved away, his aunt-mother wrote to tell him her health was failing rapidly and that she didn’t have long to live. She wondered what was to become of her. This is what John Todd wrote her:

My Dear Aunt and Mother,

Years ago I left a house of death not knowing where I was to go, whether anyone cared, and whether it was the end of me. The ride was long but Caesar encouraged me. Finally, he pointed out your candle to me, and there we were in the yard and you embraced me and took me by the hand into my own room that you had made up. After all these years I still can’t believe it – how you did all that for me! I was expected! I felt safe in that room – so welcomed. It was my room.

Now it is your turn to go, and as one who has tried it out, I’m writing to let you know that Someone is waiting up. Your room is all ready, the light is on, the door is open, and as you ride into the yard – don’t worry. You are expected! I know. I once saw God standing in your doorway – long ago!

In John's Gospel, right after our passage comes chapter 14 where Jesus talks about going to prepare a place for each of us. God's love is secure. A mother's Christ-like love is secure. We don't doubt it. We can count it.

First, Christ-like love is secure. Second, Christ-like love is sacrificial. It offers encouragement and hope. In verses 31 and 32, Jesus is speaking of his glorification through his death. Again, it is about servanthood. He washed the disciple's feet. Now he will die for them and for all humanity. When he tells us to love others as he has loved, we cannot escape the element of sacrifice.

Mothers tend to live sacrificial lives. How many stories have you heard or read about mothers, especially single mothers, who work two jobs, seven days a week, to ensure their child can go to college and have a good life? Sacrifice is the willingness to set aside something of who we are so that someone else can realize something of who they are. Jesus set himself aside on the cross that we might realize the kingdom of God on earth as well as in heaven.

Years ago, a young mother was making her way across the hills of South Wales, carrying her tiny baby in her arms, when she was overtaken by a blinding blizzard. She never reached her destination and when the blizzard had subsided her body was found by searchers beneath a mound of snow. But they discovered that before she died, she had taken off all her outer clothing and wrapped it around her baby. When they unwrapped the baby, to their great surprise and joy, they found he was alive and well. The mother had mounded her body over his and given her life for her own child, proving the depths of a mother's Christ-like love. Years later, that child, David Lloyd George, grown to adulthood, became prime minister of Great Britain and one England's greatest statesmen.

This proclamation does not have an ending. It will go on as long as there are mothers as well as others to emulate Christ in the world, to show Christ-like love to their families and friend. Today is the Sabbath. We honor and remember our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose love we are secure and who sacrificially gave of himself that we might have life and have it abundantly, now and forever. Today is Mother's Day. We honor and remember our mothers, past and present, in whose love we are secure and who sacrificially give of themselves that we might be more fulfilled as God's children. Mothers, we thank you for showing us Christ-like love every day of our lives. You truly are living Jesus' commandment to love as he loved, and we thank God and you. Amen? Amen!

- Pastor Richmond B. Stoakes, Carbondale Community United Methodist Church, 8 May 2011  
[Mother's Day]