

“THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THING ON EARTH”

(Proverbs 31:27-31)

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[East Cobb U.M.C.; 5-9-10]

–I–

1. [BOTH Services] Read Text [MSG at 9:30, NRSV at 11]: Proverbs 31:27-31 and Pray.

2. [STORY OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THING ON EARTH]

The story is told that God once gave an angel the task of coming down from heaven to find the most beautiful thing on earth and bring it back to heaven. It was springtime, so when the angel saw some lovely flowers in bloom, she said to herself, “This must be the most beautiful thing on all the earth.” So she gathered them up to take back to heaven.

Yet as she continued her journey, she met a small child of golden hair with a lovely smile, and she thought, “Certainly *this* must be the most beautiful thing on earth. After all, what could be more beautiful than the smile of an innocent child?” So she took the child’s smile with her to take back to heaven.

But further along, in a remote valley, she came to a tiny, humble cottage where a mother sat in a doorway with a small baby on her lap. As the angel watched her tender care for her baby, she once again thought to herself, “Surely *this* must be the fairest and most beautiful thing on earth.” So she took that mother’s love with her to take back to heaven.

The angel was all excited because she had not *one*, but *three* “most beautiful things” that she brought back with her from earth. But by the time she reached the gates of heaven, she found that the flowers had faded and were all dead, and the smile on the young child’s face had grown up and changed into a scowl, but the mother’s love remained intact: tender and caring. It was then that she knew that the most beautiful thing on all the earth was a mother’s love.

3. It’s been said that “*the four sweetest words in the English language are: heaven; home; love; ...and mother.*”

A–So on this Mother’s Day, we pause to celebrate and honor the beauty of motherhood, and to thank God for our mothers.

1–And we do this whether our mothers are so by biology, or adoption or merely because they are “like mothers” to us.

2–We celebrate today whether our mothers are still here with us, or have gone home to be with God, and also we celebrate whether or not *our* mothers have lived up to the ideal of motherhood (because even if *they* didn’t, *we* can).¹

B–Now, even though today’s scripture (Proverbs 31) speaks about more than just “mothers” – in many Bibles its subtitled “*In Praise of a Worthy Women*” – the theme of the beauty of motherhood nevertheless *does run* throughout its verses.

C–And so, I’d like to suggest from this scripture today just a few reasons why we should thank God for the “beauty” of our mothers (by whatever way they are so).

-II-

4. First of all, I believe that today's scripture teaches that mothers are beautiful because of **WHO THEY ARE.**

A–Verses 28-29 say of mothers that...

(MSG) *“Her children respect and bless her; her husband joins in with words of praise: ‘Many women have done wonderful things, but you’ve outclassed them all!’”*

(NRSV) *“Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband too, and he praises her, saying: ‘Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.’”*

1–I think this is telling us that at their best, mothers exemplify the very love, care, and compassion of God Himself.

2–Perhaps that's why someone has called motherhood “a partnership with God” – that mothers are, in fact, one of God's tools on earth.

B–This is, in fact, the case throughout the Bible, where we find God using mothers in unique and wonderful ways to raise up mighty leaders:

1–Think about Hannah's pleading for a son that was granted when Samuel was born and grew up to be great Old Testament prophet.²

2–Consider Sarah and Rebekah, who's prayers were answered when Isaac and Jacob were born and grew up to be great leaders of God's people.³

3–Remember the strong faith of Mary, who's trust in God enabled her to accept her role as the mother of God's own son, Jesus.⁴

4–And certainly Jesus himself *lived* the truth and love of God that he *learned* from an early age *by* his mother.

5–And in the New Testament writings, we also read of how the faith of Timothy's mother Eunice and grandmother Lois enabled him to become one of the leaders of the early church.⁵

C–You see, God uses mothers as an instrument on earth to mold and shape lives, creating and sustaining all of us as His people of faith.

5. But not only are mothers beautiful because of who they are as God's instruments on earth, but also because of **WHAT THEY DO.**

A–Verse 27 tells us that a worthy woman/mother (MSG) *“keeps an eye on everyone in her household, and keeps them all busy and productive.”* (NRSV) *“looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness.”*

B–Now, I’ve never seen a written job description for mothers, but if there *were*, it read something like this from Guideposts:

“A mother is... Keeper of all things: homework papers; matching mittens; Blinky the teddy bear; permission slips; practice schedules... all available immediately upon request. Knower of all things: when ‘I’m sick’ is sick enough to call the doctor; when a difficult ‘no’ is more important than an easy ‘yes’; when learning from a mistake is more important than ‘fixing it’; the importance of birthdays; the names of all your children’s friends. Maker of all things: Chocolate chip cookies, forgetful mistakes (like the names of your child’s friends), Halloween costumes, dentist appointments, Christmas spirit, peace in the family, messy beds, brown bag lunches, children’s smiles” ...and the author goes on to say that “The position gives no sick leave, no days off, involves dirty diapers, interrupted sleep, risk of heartbreak and rejection, demands lots of overtime, and absolutely no pay!”⁶

C–So, it’s not a very glamorous or attractive job, but it’s one with eternal rewards because through all of these things that mothers “do,” they not only prepare *us* for heaven as children, but they prepare themselves a place in *God’s own heart*.

1–One young mother with three children (all under age 7) once remarked that
“If what we do on earth prepares us for what we’ll be doing in heaven, then I know what I’ll be doing: I’ll be washing dishes and chasing little angels.”

2–Well, there IS no greater preparation for heaven than the Christian home, for through their prayers and their Christlike example, mothers can prepare our hearts and lives *here* for an eternity in *heaven* with God.

6. Finally, today’s scripture reminds us that mothers are beautiful because of **WHAT THEY LEAVE US.**

A–Verses 30-31 tell us that...

(MSG) *“Charm can mislead and beauty soon fades. The woman to be admired and praised is the woman who lives in the fear of God. [So] give her everything she deserves! Festoon her life with praises!”*

(NRSV) *“Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. [So] give her a share in the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the city gates.”*

1–You see, mothers leave us who WE are – for better or worse, we *are* who we are today because of our mothers. We are (as NRSV Verse 31 puts it), the *“fruit of her hands.”*

2–In a manner of speaking, the garments of life and character that *we* wear are the ones woven by and given to us by our mothers.

B—As today’s scripture says, when a mother has the “*fear of the Lord*” (i.e., the honoring of God) within themselves, then it can’t help but come be gradually woven into the lives of those “children” of hers (whether biological or not) whom she loves and cares for.

C—You see, perhaps the greatest legacy that mothers can leave with us... is faith – faith in ourselves, faith in others, and faith in God.

–III–

8. So as we celebrate motherhood on this day, we celebrate how the “mothers” of our lives are beautiful because of...

A—...**WHO they are:** *God’s instruments* on earth to mold and shape our lives.

B—...**WHAT they do:** through their own Christlike example, they *prepare us for heaven*.

C—...**What they LEAVE us:** a legacy of *faith in ourselves, in others, and in God*.

9. Today, let’s each find time to share a word of thanks to God for the beauty of the mothers among us – to celebrate and give thanks for “*The Most Beautiful Thing On Earth*”: a mother’s love.

10. [PRAY]

ENDNOTES:

1. After all, not all of us still have our mothers with us physically here on earth. But that doesn’t prevent their *memory* from continuing to inspire and bless us still today. In addition, while some couples are biologically unable to have children, that does not *disqualify* them from being able to be “mothers.” Instead some are mothers through legal adoption, some are our *spiritual* and *emotional* mothers who, through their *love*, have been *like* biological mothers to us. Finally, not all have had role model mothers as examples to follow, and have not lived up to the high ideals of motherhood. However, those of us here *can learn to be* such a mother, regardless of the experience(s) we had with our own mother.

2. Read 1 Samuel 1.

3. Read Genesis 17.

4. Read Luke 1.

5. Read 2 Timothy 1:5.

6. Guideposts magazine (May 13, 1990).