



An old Spanish proverb says, “An ounce of mother is worth a pound of clergy.” It’s awfully tempting to just sit down and invite mothers- whether biological or otherwise- to stand up and preach! But I will struggle on.....

Our relationship with our parents: mothers and fathers – has a significant impact on

how we grow into adults and what kind of adults we become. Not every person is cut out to be a “good” parent. And what is a “good” parent to one person may not be to another. We tend to make assumptions, as Americans, that all parental relationships are good and healthy. Unfortunately, too many of us know, either personally or when we stop to think about it, that that assumption is not always true. It is, however, a hope, a dream, but not always a reality.

And, for some of us, our “mother” or our “father” in the best sense of that relationship may not be our biological parent. Others have stepped in to help us when our biological parent might not have been able to be the parent we wished for.

Believe it or not, this riff on parenting relates to our ideal relationship as expressed in the reading from Acts and the other scriptures today. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

In the best of families, we gather for education and for meals. Sometimes that education is Bible-based and sometimes it is googling the Wikipedia article and looking up the answer to our questions followed by discussion around the dinner table. Time spent together learning and listening and growing. The best relationships are those where we can ask questions- where we can be vulnerable- and we can learn the answers through conversation and through learning where to go to look up the answers. Mentoring of our youth, through the Youth Service Bureau program or otherwise, can be one way we care for children not related to us by blood but precious just the same. Remember that we get the world we create – or the world we ignore. It is up to us to find time and ways to devote ourselves and our children to “the apostles’ teaching and fellowship.” One of the best lessons we can give to our children or our mentees is the gift of curiosity and then the means to answer the questions. To support inquiry and development of analytical skills rather than asking our children or mentees to just meekly swallow our answer. To be fruitful, the question and the answer need our support and not just our mandate.

“All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.” One wonders about Karl Marx

Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 23; 1 Peter 2:19-25; John 10:1-10

when he said that religion was the opiate of the masses. If Marx was familiar with this verse from the Acts of the Apostles, one would think he might have used it to support his vision of communal society. Apparently he did not.

It's unlikely most of us desire to live in a truly communal setting although we do have religious persons who live, even today, in intentional community when much is shared. Places where you and I might go on retreat include communities where persons have given up individual ownership of much for the good of the whole. In many families, the parents give up their wants in order to provide what is needed for their children.

For those who mentor, you give up time that you could be doing something else so that your mentee has some quality time in a safe and wholesome setting.

Last night was the "Dancing with the Stars" fundraiser. While a dance contest does not appeal to all, it does to many as evidenced by the fact that tickets sold out within a day or two of their becoming available. Yes, a good time was had by those who attended. The purpose of the event- to raise money for CASA – court appointed special advocates- program and the Youth Service Bureau, tells us that we have a ways to go before we can say, as Luke, the writer of the Acts of the Apostles put it: "They broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people."

There are too many who suffer today for any number of reasons. It might be physical, emotional or financial. It might even be spiritual. Something in their life is not optimum. There is a gap between what ought to be in the realm of God and what is. We are called, through our faith, to reach out to those who suffer that gap. We cannot fix everything but we can offer a helping hand, a smile, some time. The ministry of presence is one of the most precious and most needed. We ought not to be afraid or dismayed or resentful that we can't fix everything. We are called to do what we can do, how we can do it, and to trust God to be present in the situation. If we will do our part, God will do the rest. And yes, that means sometimes God is present and answers the need in ways we do not see or sometimes in ways we wish were otherwise.

In this time of considering the healthy and holy relationships that we are part of or we wish to be part of, and the ways in which God is present in our world, the lessons from First Peter and John can be a disquieting, discordant and exclusivist note. Being scripture, though, we must read and discern what those lessons are saying to us today and how we are to respond in our time and place. Knowing what they likely meant to those when they were written gives us background for how we come to understand and apply them today.

Unfortunately, the First Letter of Peter has been understood by some to mean that spouses or children should stay in abusive or unhealthy or destructive relationships. Somehow that seems at odds with the life and message of Jesus as set forth in the Gospels. Jesus is the one who told us to love God and love neighbor. To turn the other cheek. To walk two miles in another's shoes. Jesus did not tell us to stay in abusive or unhealthy or destructive situations.

Some have read the Gospel lesson to mean that understanding Jesus in a particular way- and only in that particular way- is paramount for salvation. However, we have four Gospels. We have 23

Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 23; 1 Peter 2:19-25; John 10:1-10

additional books within the New Testament that expand upon the Gospels. Each of these 27 books – together- makes up the entire New Testament. And guess what? They don't all agree. There are parts of Matthew, Mark and Luke that are similar and there are parts of each of them that are not in the other two. The Gospel of John is in many ways quite different from Matthew, Mark and Luke. Yet each of these gospels, and each of the other 23 books, is included in our Bible. They each have something important to tell us about God, our relationship with God and with each other.

Remember also that the books of the New Testament were written in Greek, which was then translated into Latin and then into the vernacular, including English. Thus, we are at least two languages removed from the original text.

Similarly, we are some 2,000 years removed from the culture of the time the scriptures in the New Testament were written. Our culture with its emphasis on individual relationship with God and individual response is almost the opposite of that first century culture.

Therefore, to read the passage from the Gospel of John as stating that there is only one way to understand and believe in Jesus is not true to the original text or culture. To read singular pronouns or nouns as meaning a singular pronoun or noun today, is to miss the point of the passage all too often in a culture where individuality did not exist- it was to be avoided. Rather, the culture of Biblical times revolved around tribe and community. We are all in this together- as community- not each individually. We are, truly, our brother's keeper in the best sense of that phrase. We are called to care for each other using our gifts and talents so that all may have the chance to know God.

What is true, then and now, is that Jesus models for us the way to relationship with God and with each other. Jesus lived that we might know how to live a healthy and productive life that is in harmony with God and with neighbor. The life that Jesus offers to us is life abundantly- flowing over with grace and gratitude for all that God has given to us and that God continues to give to us.

Being human, it is unlikely that any of us will end this life without some suffering and loss. It might be the death of child or parent or close friend and a time when our grief is numbing and it is all we can do to get out of bed and contemplate how to live now that one who meant so much to us is no longer with us.

It might be the death of a relationship that once had such promise but has somehow gone off the rails. A child who has failed to live up to the potential we saw in them but which they did not see in themselves. And now we have to learn to live with the consequences of choices that are not what we wanted for them.

It might be our dreams of a career have been quashed and we have to find new work that can be challenging and renewing even as we grieve the loss of those dreams.

Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 23; 1 Peter 2:19-25; John 10:1-10

It might even be the death of our parish. Without vision, the people perish. We can get so tied up with our own life that we think “someone else will do it” but no one else steps up and ministry dies.

The suffering might be what has been experienced in Crawfordsville. The bullying of students by other students because beliefs were not understood in the same way about God and salvation. While respecting freedom of speech – even religious speech- we also are reminded each time we recite our Baptismal Covenant that we are to respect the dignity of every human being- not only those with whom we share the same religious beliefs, but every human being (BCP 305). And yes, we are also to call out behavior that is unhealthy and destructive- not simply to be passive and hope someone else will call the other to account.

Whether your relationship with your parent – or with your children- is all that you hoped and wanted it to be or not, let us honor those today who are parents, biological or otherwise. They have taken on roles and responsibilities that are so necessary in our lives if we are to live as fully human in relationship with God and with others. Whatever our faults and failings, let us strive to do better whether our children are small or grown. And as children, let us forgive our parents for being human and not always what we might have wished, loving them for doing the best that they could in the circumstances in which we found ourselves.

Jesus is the guardian of our souls. Jesus is without sin and without preoccupations that keep him from loving us. Jesus came that we might have life and have it abundantly. Trust in that promise and love your parents, your mentors and your children and mentees with the love of God, given to you so abundantly and given forever. **Amen.**