

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Lena, IL – 14 May 2023**  
**Sixth Sunday of Easter - Year A**

**1st Reading: Acts 17:22-31**

**Psalm: 66:8-20**

**2nd Reading: 1 Peter 3:13-22**

**Gospel: John 14:15-21**

**Sermon** - *Vicar Thomas J. Mosbø*

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Happy Mothers Day to every mother who is with us today. I do not normally care to embrace the secular holidays that want to make their way into our liturgical calendars, but I do have a very good theological reason for doing so this morning, which is quite simple: We ought to follow the Ten Commandments, the moral foundation for our lives as Christians - and one of those commandments tells us to “Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.”

So it is not only a good thing to honour our mothers, we are actually commanded by God to do so. And as Jesus tells us in our Gospel reading today: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments... Whoever has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me.” If we honour our mothers, then, it is also a sign that we love Jesus.

And as Paul reminds us in Ephesians, this is the first commandment with a promise: “That it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.” So if we honour our mothers our lives in the land will go well.

Now, does this sound like I’m trying to coerce you all into honouring your mothers - you’d better do it if you love Jesus and want things to go well? Quite the contrary - I know that we all want to honour the mothers among us today, and doing so is such a wonderful thing that it is an expression not only of our love for our mothers, but of our love for God as well, and it will have a positive effect not only for our mothers, but for ourselves as well.

Yet why would one of God's ten most important instructions for us be to honour our Fathers and our Mothers? Martin Luther, in his usual way of stating things simply and elegantly, in his Small Catechism says in explaining this commandment that "We are to fear and love God, so that we neither despise nor anger our parents and others in authority, but instead honor, serve, obey, love, and respect them."

So Luther here gives us one strong clue as to what this commandment is all about when he refers to "our parents and others in authority". Our parents are in authority over us. They aren't just the people who happened to bring us into this world, but it was their responsibility to care for us, nurture us, guide us, and to educate and even punish us when we went astray in ways that were harmful to ourselves and to others. In other words, they were God's representatives to us, and for many of us, it was through our parents that we first began to understand who God is and how we are to think and behave as God's children.

Now, it is interesting that there are a few different ways of numbering and grouping the Ten Commandments. As Lutherans, we tend to follow the numbering system of the Catholic Church, which numbers this particular commandment as Number 4, so that there are three commandments that have to do with our relationship with God, and seven, beginning with the commandment to honour our parents, that have to do with our relationships with each other.

But the Jewish way of numbering and grouping the commandments is slightly different. In their understanding the commandment to honour our parents is Commandment Number 5, and there are considered to be 5 commandments about our relationship with God, and 5 about our relationships with each other. So in the Jewish understanding, this commandment is not so much about our relationship with other people, but our relationship with God. As Luther had also implied, our parents are our God-given authorities, and our respect for our parents is an aspect of our respect for God.

Not all relationships between parents and children are always perfect, however, but then again our relationships with God are also not always perfect. To quote Shakespeare's King Lear, whose daughters were fighting over their inheritance even before their father had died: "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child." Those who do not honour their fathers and their mothers bring shame upon their parents, but equally shame upon themselves for being thankless and ungrateful.

And yet, how often are we thankless and ungrateful toward God? And when we are ungrateful, we do indeed bring shame upon ourselves, and shame God in front of the whole world. But when we are thankful, we bring honour to God and show ourselves to be better for having done so.

In the same way, when we honour our fathers and mothers, we not only show respect to them, but we also show the world that we are respectful and respectable ourselves - and as Christians, of course, this means that we show the world how honourable God is.

But today is not “fathers and mothers” day, but just Mothers Day, and it is a good thing for our society to put so much emphasis on Mothers in this way - far more attention is given to Mothers Day than to Fathers Day, and this is a good thing. Our mothers have often been unsung heroes, caring for us, comforting us, holding our deepest thoughts, feelings, and cares in their hearts - suffering when we suffer, rejoicing when we do well, giving of themselves unselfishly, tirelessly, for our sakes.

It sounds a little bit like God, doesn't it? And although we often think of God as our Father, there are images in the Bible that tell us how God cares for us just as a loving mother cares for her children. For example, Jesus himself once said, “How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings”.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus tells us how on Pentecost, the Father would send another Advocate, the Holy Spirit, who would remain with us forever, and there are many ways that the Bible talks about the Holy Spirit that suggest we might think of the Spirit as our Mother - Holy Wisdom, the comforting presence of God in whom we “live and move and have our being”.

So perhaps on Mothers Day, it is appropriate for us to think about our own mothers, not just as representatives of God in general, but representatives of the Holy Spirit in our lives, comforting and caring for us with all the love they are able to give.

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

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