

Sermon by Rev. Dr. Michael J. Hoyt
Glenshaw Presbyterian Church
Sixth Sunday of Easter ~ Mother's Day
May 9, 2010

Baptizing Mothers

Acts 16:9-15

Mother's Day is a good time to try to view the world through the eyes of a child. You may have seen this little bit about the 2nd grade school children who were asked questions about their mothers...
(it includes some questions I didn't dare ask during the children's sermon!).

Why did God make mothers?

1. She's the only one who knows where the scotch tape is.
2. Mostly to clean the house.
3. To help us out of there when we were getting born.

What ingredients are mothers made of?

1. God makes mothers out of clouds and angel hair and everything nice in the world... and one dab of mean.
2. They had to get their start from men's bones. Then they mostly use string, I think.

What kind of a little girl was your mom?

1. My mom has always been my mom and none of that other stuff.
2. I don't know because I wasn't there, but my guess would be pretty bossy.
3. They say she used to be nice.

Who's the boss at your house?

1. Mom doesn't want to be boss, but she has to because dad's such a goof ball.
2. Mom. You can tell by room inspection. She sees the stuff under the bed.
3. I guess mom is, but only because she has a lot more to do than dad.

What does your mom do in her spare time?

1. Mothers don't do spare time.

If you could change one thing about your mom, what would it be?

1. She has this weird thing about me keeping my room clean. I'd get rid of that.
2. I'd make my mom smarter. Then she would know it was my sister who did it not me.
3. I would like for her to get rid of those invisible eyes on the back of her head.

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Well, we have celebrated Mother's Day in fine fashion this morning. Not only did we have 3 mothers present their children for baptism, but we even baptized one of the mothers herself, Lisa Gerdes.

This is the second time in a month of Sundays
that we have baptized mother and child, or mother and children,
on the same day -
you'll recall that we also rejoiced with the Mark & Jen Paczan on Easter Sunday
at the baptism of Jen and their son, Tanner.
Jen and Lisa, in fact, have become a blessing to each other
as they went through baptismal preparation together,
and shared in exploring the rich mystery of the Gospel.

When I discovered that the lectionary reading for today was the story of Lydia,
and how *she and her household were baptized*
I sent the passage to Lisa by email.

She was a little worried about the way the story ended,
when Lydia prevailed upon Paul and his missionary companions
to stay at her home -
Lisa wondered if she should invite the whole congregation to her house
for Mother's Day dinner!

What time should we be there, Lisa? Anything we can bring?

Seriously, this is the perfect passage for today.

We have here the account of Paul's second missionary journey
which lasted three years and covered about two thousand miles.
In this journey Paul visits the Greek cities to which he later write letters:
Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus.

Even though, by this time,
there were Jews living in all the major cities of the Roman Empire,
Philippi apparently did not have the 10 Jewish males required
to establish a formal synagogue.

So just outside a gate of the city, by the river
a little group of Jews was in the practice of gathering
to observe the Jewish Sabbath.

Along with these Jews were others known as God-fearers,
or worshipers of God.

Worshipers of God were Greek Gentiles
who became attached to a local synagogue
and worshiped with the Jews,
even though they didn't observe the entire Jewish legal code.

Lydia was one of these worshipers of God.
Being a business woman, a trader in purple cloth,
she would have been a well-to-do member of Philippian society.
So for Lydia and her household to be baptized,
if this included her servants,
it would likely have been a significant group of people.

It was this group of Jews and God-worshippers
that Paul and his companions found by the river
just outside the gates of Philippi.

We need to appreciate what a great a stretch it would have been for Paul
to preach to Gentiles, let alone Gentile women.
In doing so, he was crossing some sizable cultural and religious barriers.

And so it was that the very first church in Europe
was founded - under the leadership of women!
And Lydia, a woman and a mother,
was the first European on record to become a Christian.

This should give pause to any Christians -
particularly those of European descent,
even more especially, those in Rome -
who deny women full participation in the church!
The path of the Gospel to our own ears
was a path pioneered by women!ⁱ

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Now, at first it may seem that Lydia's commitment to Christ
comes about in a sudden, almost nonchalant way,
like the impulse purchase of someone who is a sucker
for a good sales pitch - and Paul could be persuasive!

But the fact that Lydia was a worshiper of God,
one who had been in the practice of attending
this informal, outdoor synagogue on the Sabbath,
means that her heart had been nurtured and prepared
for this moment of response.

The same could be said for each one who has stood before us to be baptized today.
God has been at work in the lives of
Lisa and her household,
David and Danielle, with baby Jane,
Todd and Holli, with baby Tyler,
Ed and Katie, who will soon be bringing baby Emily to this font.

Conversion to the Christian faith, is not a one-time event,
but a continual conversion,
or a continuous series of conversion after conversion.
Sometimes the truth flashes before us in unavoidable brilliance,
sometimes joy surprises and washes over us,
sometimes we are moved by the depth of God's love
and the power of God's grace...

...But other times we merely slog through the hardships of human existence,
moving from pain to pain, from doubt to fear to discouragement,
wondering how God is working, or if God is even there.
Even so, God's grace has a way of slipping in the back door,
and doing it's work despite our circumstances.
even for a time without our being aware of it.
But then awareness comes, and we are amazed.
God is always preparing us for our next moment of joy,
for the next rush of the Spirit,
the next flow of water,
the next flash of light,
that reveals to us the good news
that God really is who Jesus says God is,
and that all we have to do is open our hearts
and receive the gift of faith.

Now it is the work of mothers, always to be planning and preparing
to meet the needs of their children...
their need for nourishment,
their need for rest,
their need for learning,
their need for a safe place to grow,
their need for a way to thrive in the face of a daunting world.

In this respect, Mothers understand the constant attentiveness of God
to each one of us as we make our way on life's journey,
how God's love and compassion never ceases
whether in a moment of tenderness, or laughter, or discipline, or sorrow.

Or to appreciate the truth of the gospel, spoken from the mouth of a child,
God's work is "to help us out of there when we are getting born"
...or getting reborn, and born yet again...and again...and again.

Baptizing Mom on Mother's Day makes a lot of sense,
and gives us a glimpse into the loving depths
of the heart of God.

ⁱ Charles Cousar, *Texts for Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994) p. 316