**THE MOTHERING LOVEOF OUR HEAVENLY FATHER**

**(Isaiah 49:14-15; 66:12-13)**

 This past week, I sent a Mother’s Day card to my mom. On the outside of the card was the picture of an electric mixer standing upright with the blades of the mixer hanging over a bowl. The front of the card read: “A good mom let’s her children lick the blades of the mixer.” On the inside was the message, “A great mom turns it off first.”

 I want you to know, I have a great mom. She not only turned off the mixer, she also detached the blades so I could safely lick the chocolate residue of her soon-to-be chocolate cake.

 I hope you had a great mom.

 I had a great dad, too, but they were distinctly different. My dad was the strong silent type, the good provider, the disciplinarian. He taught me the value of a dollar by keeping my monthly allowance to about a $1. He took my golfing on Saturdays, holidays, and summer vacations. He didn’t teach me how to swing a golf club. My brother did that. My dad taught me how not to swing a golf club. He did teach me other things such as golf course etiquette.

 My mom, however, was my greatest teacher. She taught me about empathy and compassion and warmth and understanding.

 I hear about single parents who try to be both mom and dad for their children. While trying to be both may be heroic, it’s really not possible, but you do the best can. It takes two people to bring a child into this world, and I believe it takes two to prepare them to live as well-adjusted, productive people in this world. Hillary said it takes a village to raise a child. I think it takes a mom and a dad.

 We often refer to God as our Heavenly Father, and He is, to be sure. The Bible normally invokes masculine language to describe God. God is the Father, and Jesus is the Groom and the King. This masculine language is used to teach us that God provides and protects and leads.

 What often is overlooked is the fact that the Bible also uses feminine language to describe God. We read in the very first chapter of the Bible, Genesis 1:27, “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

 Both men and women were created to display the image of God. God is neither male nor female. God is Spirit. God doesn’t have sexual organs. He has neither testosterone or estrogen flowing through His veins because He is Spirit, not flesh and blood. Of course, at the incarnation, Jesus did become a man, but Jesus existed before the incarnation.

 While Scripture uses male titles for God, it also employs feminine imagery to describe Him. There are at least 26 passages where God is presented in a feminine way. He is compared to a mother eagle, a mother bear, and a mother hen. He is referred to as a midwife and a housekeeper. This contrast between the masculine and feminine sides of God is beautifully illustrated in Isaiah 42:13-14. There are more feminine portrayals of God in Isaiah than in any other book of the Bible. In one verse God is crying out like a man of war and in the next verse He is crying out like a woman in labor.

 Moms, when you gave birth to your child, you were being like God. As you lovingly raised your family, you were being like God.

 We are going to look at two other passages from Isaiah this Mother’s Day, as we as we consider, “The Mothering Love of Our Heavenly Father.”

 Let’s begin with Isaiah 49:14-15. Here we see a complaint made by God’s people to God and the answer God gives to that complaint.

 Have you ever felt that God has forgotten you? Maybe there was a prayer you prayed, and God didn’t answer your prayer. Maybe you found yourself in a predicament, and God did not extract you from that situation. You felt as though God had forgotten you. “God, where were you when I needed you?!”

 Look at v. 15. The likelihood of a mother forgetting about the child she is nursing or having no concern for the baby she bore is slim to none, but the possibility of God forgetting about His children is zero.

1. **GOD DISPLAYS HIS MOTHERING LOVE BY THE CONCERN HE SHOWS.**

God is using this passage to tell us, “Don’t let your circumstances make you think that I don’t care about you.” Instead of seeking to interpret God’s love based on our circumstances, let’s interpret our circumstances based on God’s love. God doesn’t keep bad things from happening because He loves you; rather, it is because He loves you that He allows bad things to happen. It is in the midst of the bad that we cling to Him and we grow.

 Have you ever noticed that first-born children are parented differently from subsequent children? When we have our first child, we are more protective.

 Someone commented that when your first child drops her pacifier, you go and boil the thing for ten minutes. On down the line, however, when your child drops his pacifier you instruct the dog to go fetch it.

 Before my son was born, his mother and I took birthing classes. The nurse who taught the class observed that when parents have their first child, they want the baby in the room 24 hours a day. When they have their second child, they want the baby with them half the time and in the nursery half the time. When they have their third child, they tell the nursing staff, “We’ll pick him up on the weekend.”

 In God’s eyes, we are all first-born children. He doesn’t treat us differently. He loves us all with an everlasting love.

 I have found that mothers parent differently than fathers. Usually, when a child does something embarrassing or rude, like burp at the table, fathers are apt to laugh and consider it funny. Many mothers, however, are horrified. They are afraid that their child is going to grow up to be a social misfit. Mothers seem to be more concerned with instilling social grace and character into their children. They have a keen sense that who their children turn out to be reflects on them.

 Please remember that who you turn out to be reflects on God, and God has a strong desire that You turn out to reflect the character of Jesus Christ. That is why God will go to every length needed to mold you into the shape of His Son.

 Like a mother, the instrument God uses best is His presence. One man wrote about what makes mothers special. The first quality he identified is what he called a mother’s “thereness.” Concerning his own mother, he wrote, “She was there for breakfast, lunch, supper, weekends, after school, and special occasions. She was there when I went to bed, when I got dressed for school, when I was sick in the middle of the night, and when I came home late. During the good times and the bad—mother was there. Dad spent long hours at work or with friends or off on errands—mother was there. She always had time for me, and she was always interested in what I was doing.”

 The same is true of our God. Whether you realize it or not, wherever you are, He is there. He is there when you are tired. He is there when you are lonely. He is there when you feel weak. He is there when you are scared. He is always there because He has not nor will he ever forget you—not even when you seem to forget Him. God makes known, to us and the world, His mothering love in **the concern He shows.**

**II. GOD DISPLAYS HIS MOTHERING LOVE BY THE COMFORT HE GIVES.**

 Look at Isaiah 66:12-13. God specializes in comforting His children. Have you noticed that when children need comfort that they usually go to mom instead of dad? There is just something about a mother’s embrace that a child needs and wants. Just as a child needs to receive it, a mother needs to give it.

 It has been my experience that most mothers want a baby that is a cuddler. Not all babies want to be held, and it is difficult when a mother discovers that her baby doesn’t want to be rocked and held. It is difficult when a mother’s baby grows into a teenager and doesn’t want to be hugged in public or asks to be let out two blocks from school. That’s tough.

 Likewise, it hurts God’s heart when we refuse to receive His affection. Look back at what God said in Isaiah 65:1-2a. Look at what the people say to God in v. 5: “Keep away; don’t come near me.”

 God longs to love us. Jesus said in Matthew 23:37, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”

 Don’t refuse the love of God. Don’t hold Him at arm’s length. Let Him come close that He might give you His comfort.

 The time was World War II. The place was Germany. The Jews had been rounded up and carted off to concentration camps. The rules of the camps were simple. If you work you are permitted to live. When you become too weak to work you will be exterminated.

 Solomon Rosenberg, his wife, their two children, and Solomon’s parents were all taken to the same camp. Solomon’s parents were old and frail. He was forced to watch as his parents were marched off to their deaths. Solomon feared for his youngest son David; he had always been a sickly child.

 Every evening, the Rosenbergs would search for one another, huddle together, and thank God for another day.

 One evening Solomon returned to the barracks but the only one of his family he could find was his oldest son Joshua. Joshua was weeping. When he found his son he said, “Josh, tell me it’s not true.”

 Joshua replied, “It is true, poppa. Today, David was not strong enough to do his work. So, they came for him.”

 “But where is your mother?” asked Solomon.

 “Oh, poppa,” said Joshua, “When they came for David, he was afraid, and he cried. Momma said, ‘There is nothing to be afraid of, David,’ and she took his hand and went with him.”

 During the difficult times of life, God doesn’t leave you; He takes your hand, and He goes with you.”

 What was it that David wrote in Psalm 23? He wrote, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me.”

 God is with you. He is with you **showing His concern** and **giving His comfort.** There is a third truth . . .

**III. GOD DISPLAYS HIS MOTHERING LOVE BY THE COUNSEL HE SPEAKS.**

 Our God is not a silent God; He is a God who has spoken and who continues to speak.

 Often in Scripture, the mother is presented as one who teaches. We read in Proverbs 1:8, “Do not forsake your mother’s teaching.” Then in Proverbs 31:26, “She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue.” Parents, both fathers and mothers, are given the duty of teaching their children. We are commanded in Deuteronomy 4:9, “Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.”

 More often than not, however, it is the mother who does the bulk of teaching in the home. Usually, the father is off making a living and the mother spends more time with the children, and she teaches throughout the entire time she is with them. She teaches by example and by formal instruction, by what she does and by what she says.

 In his book, *My Mother Played the Piano,* John William Smith, a story-teller and an author, wrote about his mother. He wrote, “My mother taught me to read. She didn’t mean to—I mean she wasn’t trying to—but she did.” He told about how she would read the Bible out loud every day, and how she was a finger reader. She would run her finger across the page, and her finger would be under each word as she said that word. Before he went off to school, little John would sit in his mom’s lap, listen to her read, and watch her finger as she read. Even before he knew the alphabet, he was able to put written words and spoken words together.

 By the time he went off to school he already knew how to read. He wrote, “[When my teacher tried to teach me to read] I told her I could already read. I could tell it hurt her feelings, so I said I was sorry—but reading was a piece of cake. They were reading Dick and Jane, and I knew Nebuchadnezzar, Jebusite, Perizzite, Shamgar, and Rehoboam. [To make her feel better] I told her she could teach me math—I was real dumb in that.”

 He went on to write, “If my mother was teaching me to read—without meaning to—she was also teaching me about God, about right and wrong, about good and evil.”

 He concluded that what he learned “did not come to me through lectures and sermons . . . they came to me through my mother’s attempt to establish and strengthen her own relationship with God. Her daily awareness of His providence, her constant devotion to Him and to His Word passed to me—naturally.”

 Moms and dads, if you want to teach your children, then develop your own relationship with God. And, if you want God to teach you, then spend time with Him. Specifically, spend time in His word.

 Let’s be aware of the mothering love of God. This Mother’s Day, in addition to honoring your mother, thank God for the **concern He has shown** you, the **comfort He has given** you, and the **counsel He has spoken** and continues to speak to you.

 Consider for a moment a story about a mother named Nancy. Nancy gave birth to a Down’s Syndrome child. Her name was Sarah. One morning when she was five years-old, Sarah proudly announced to her mother that she had gotten ready for Vacation Bible School all by herself.

 Nancy looked to see that . . .

* Sarah’s shorts were on backwards.
* The price tag hung from the front of her polka-dot top which was also on backwards.
* Sarah had chosen unmatched red and green socks.
* Her tennis shoes were on the wrong feet, and
* She wore a baseball cap with the emblem turned backwards.

 Sarah also announced that she had packed her backpack, too. She unzipped it to show her mother the contents: five Lego blocks, a box of unopened paper clips, a fork, an undressed Cabbage Patch doll, three jigsaw puzzle pieces, and a crib sheet from the linen closet.

 Not wanting to discourage her, Nancy said, “You look beautiful.”

 With time running short, Nancy had to get herself and her other children ready to go. As she buckled her children in Nancy tried to convince Sarah to let her keep the backpack, that she wouldn’t need it for Vacation Bible School.”

 Sarah wouldn’t hear of it. She said, “Noooo. I neeeed it!”

 When they got to the church, Nancy tried to redo Sarah’s outfit. Sarah pulled back and said, “Nooo. I looook beauuutiful!”

 Just then Sarah’s teacher came by and said, “You do look beautiful!” She told Sarah’s mom, “You can pick Sarah up at 11:30. We’ll take care of her.”

 Nancy knew that they would, and she drove off. She returned a few minutes early. She peeked through the door and saw Sarah sitting with her back towards her. She was clutching her backpack with her shorts, top, and baseball cap still on backwards. As she looked at her daughter, she thought to herself, “I sure do love her.”

 At that moment, she felt as though God was speaking to her heart saying, “That’s the way I feel about *you*.” Nancy realized that she was just like Sarah. Her life was as mixed up as Sarah’s outfit. She had been holding on to a backpack full of useless things—things such as anxiety, doubt, and fear. She imagined God saying to her, “Let me carry that for you.”

 What needless burdens are you carrying today? Give them to God, and while you do that, entrust yourself to the Heavenly Father who loves you with a mother’s love. By the way, He will also dress you with the righteousness of His Son, Jesus Christ. Give yourself to Him.