

"Inspired by Moms"
Off-Lectionary for Mother's Day

Texts: Isaiah 66:13
2 Timothy 1:1-5
Matthew 15:21-28

Preached: 5/10/15



Monday afternoon...

I took my son, Ben, to the orthodontist. That's our office. They call it Good Orthodontist, because the two doctors are brothers...Dr. Good and Dr. Good, although we have a clear favorite, so we think of them as Dr. Good and Dr. Evil!

Ben just got his braces off and was getting his new retainer. Although the office waiting room was crowded – it's always crowded – it wasn't too long until Ben was called back.

I was the only father in the waiting room – all the other kids, teens mostly, were accompanied by their moms. Some moms were waiting alone, their kids must have been in the back getting worked on. But I noticed three different moms waiting with their children. I had some time to observe these pairs.



Sitting right next to me was a Mom beside her teenage son. She was asking him about his day and about his classes. How was math? How was the test? Did you turn in your social studies paper? Was Mr. Martin back, or did you still have a substitute? The Mom was trying to engage her son in conversation, trying to find out about his school day – but he was ignoring her. He wasn't even answering her questions – well, sometimes with a one word answer, which didn't satisfy her. She was patient and persistent, but she didn't get much out of him. I glanced to the other two moms and it was just about the same story. The mom trying to talk, the teen ignoring.

I had my sermon on my mind – I already had my title, "Inspired by Moms!" I silently joked to myself – "clearly everyone is not inspired by moms! I'm afraid too many of us take our moms for granted. We certainly benefit from having them around – but do we appreciate them, honor them, take a moment and gather inspiration from them?"



A second grade teacher was giving her class a lesson on magnets. She had gone over objects that were magnetic and some that were non-magnetic. Now came the question session. She asked the class, "My name starts with an M and I pick up things. What am I?" A little boy in the front row shot up his hand and said, "A mother!"

At least he was giving his mom credit – even if he wasn't paying so much attention to the class material!

Today I want to give moms credit, too. After all, they do take care of us, and they help us grow – they are our first and most important teachers.

While Mothers' Day is hardly a religious holiday – it could be. The Bible is filled with some great mothers. How 'bout the Book of Exodus, early chapters, Jochebed takes care of her son and helps him grow in an extraordinary way. Her son's name is Moses.



Fearing for his life, she floated him down the Nile River in a cradle boat, a basket made of reeds, literally, an ark. But she wasn't selling him down the river, she knew exactly what she was doing, because around the first bend was Pharaoh's daughter, who took the baby for orphan and immediately brought him into her house. Moses was so tiny and vulnerable that he needed a nursemaid and soon. Pharaoh's daughter didn't have to look long, for a (QUOTE) woman of the Hebrews (END QUOTE) quickly presented herself. It was, of course, Moses' own mother, Jochebed – who never once let the supposed orphan Moses out of her sight!



There are lots of stories of mothers...inspiring mothers in the Bible. For instance, there was Sarah the Mother of Isaac and Ishamael. Rebecca, the Mother of Jacob. Rachel, the Mother of Joseph...and most recognizable, Mary, the mother of Jesus. These were all mighty women of faith who raised champions for God.

But this morning, we meet a less well-known biblical mother. Her name is never given. She is known simply as the Canaanite woman – an unlikely New Testament hero, because she was not a Jew. She was rather an outsider. Not only was she a woman, but a pagan woman, at that!



For Jesus even to entertain a conversation with such a character is doubly defiling for him. The strict behavioral codes of decency in Near Eastern culture sternly frowned on women and men socializing. The brazen approach of this lone woman to Jesus and his disciples makes her especially questionable. If that is not enough, she has brought her daughter, who is possessed by a demon.

Here is an inspiring mother. She has multiple strikes against her – yet she is determined. She doesn't care about cultural norms, she doesn't care about her own embarrassment, she doesn't care what people will think.

She knows who Jesus is and has some sense that he can help her daughter. And she will not be denied! Her first address to Jesus is "Lord," the title given Jesus by all true believers in Matthew's Gospel. She further defines Jesus as the "Son of David," a term used in Matthew's Gospel by the riff-raff, the no-accounts who nonetheless are able to see in Jesus the Messiah of Israel.



Jesus' first response to this Canaanite woman is baffling. In the face of her substantial confession, he is simply silent. He does not answer her, seems to ignore her, just like he is sitting in the Orthodontist's waiting room being grilled about his math test!
of God!

We don't know what was in Jesus' mind. Whether he is taken aback by her bold approach, momentarily undecided about how he should respond, trying to ignore her in hopes she will go away; or whether he is using his silence to evoke more engagement on her part is unclear.



No matter, the woman continues her pleading, and her persistence leads the disciples to add their voices to the clamor.

The advice of the disciples is not to "send her away" empty-handed, but rather for Jesus to respond quickly to her request so that they can be rid of her embarrassing presence. The disciples are hardly motivated by compassion for this Mother and her child. Rather, they are solely interested in expedience.

Jesus' words, spoken to the disciples, but certainly directed at the woman as well, sound cold and callous, even if accurate. Jesus, no-doubt, understood his ministry as a journey leading towards human salvation. But biblical tradition stipulated that first he must save Israel so that the Jews could then witness to the rest of the world. Jesus clarifies for the woman that he was sent to the "lost sheep" of House of Israel.



The mother seems encouraged that Jesus at least acknowledges her presence. She now comes and kneels before Jesus. The Greek term *proskyneō* denotes a worshipful act of reverence. Once more she properly addresses Jesus as "Lord," this time adding only the pathetic plea "help me." But again she is rebuffed by Jesus - in what appears to be the harshest terms yet.



"The children" of God are to be fed first. She is only a dog, Jesus accuses. She seems scathingly rebuked. Yet, it is in the face of this cutting remark that the woman becomes her most articulate. "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." By using her wit and humility, she refutes Jesus' excuse and finds for him a reason to grant her the healing she so desperately desires.

Instead of disputing her status as second-in-line behind the mission to Israel, she humbly acknowledges her position. But her clever use of Jesus' own image demonstrates to him that there is still a way that she might receive a portion of God's bread. The Canaanite woman does not deny the children of Israel the primacy of the table. Yet, she asserts that there remains a place for her as well.



'Woman, great is your faith!
Let it be done for you as you wish.' Matthew 15:28

Jesus is clearly struck by her retort, impressed and inspired by this Gentile woman's tenacity and vision. She gives Jesus a glimpse of how his Father's table set before Israel is even then being stretched, widened to accommodate a far more inclusive group of diners. While this mother is clever, Jesus praises her faith...and because of that, she will receive the healing for her daughter she so craves. With his declaration, "Great is your faith," Jesus defines the new qualification for admission to God's table, not lineage any longer – but faithfulness.

JESUS IS AN EXPERT ON FAITH. The Bible tells us that He searched for it as a gem collector searches for fine jewels. You might say, "Jesus hunted faith like a dog hunts a bone!" And when He found it He was inspired...filled with joy.

He didn't always find it in His disciples. Not once did He say to Peter, John, or James, "You have great faith." But He said it to the nameless Canaanite mother, a mother who would:

Cross great barriers...

Show great persistence and resilience...

Yet, make no claim for herself, but only for her beloved daughter – as she relied solely on the grace of Jesus.

Jesus was clearly inspired by the Canaanite mother.

Perhaps God has always been inspired by mothers – for God says to his people in Isaiah "As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you."



I am grateful for mothers today – mothers who take care of us, and teach us and help us grow. I am inspired by mothers of great faith, like the Eunice and Lois mentioned by the Apostle Paul, women who clearly guided their boy, Timothy.

I hope you are inspired by Moms, too. If not biblical moms, or nameless moms, then today, at least, your own mom, who gave you birth, by the grace of God!