

A Mother's Hope

Shepherd's Grace Church

May 12, 2013

²⁰"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

²⁴Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵"Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them." (Also Read Acts 16: 16-34, Rev. 22: 12-14, 16-17, 20-21)

Cast your eyes upon Jesus,

look full in His wonderful face

And the world you see will grow strangely dim

In the light of His glory and grace!

One of the most lasting and durable images I have of my mom is of her driving a car. It wasn't just any car and I wasn't even riding with her. I was riding in the car just ahead of her with my dad. We were driving down a muddy steep road—well, it wasn't a road really, it was more a path with some old tire tracks. It was August and we were in Colorado on a boy scout camping trip. Mom was one of the drivers who agreed to come out with us to help provide transportation and we had been camped at about 11,000 feet in the Colorado Rockies for 10 days. Camping was over and we were headed home but the weather had turned bad. Not long after we left camp the clouds rolled in quickly and it started raining very hard. Even with windshield wipers running full speed the drivers could barely see the end of the car in front of them. The road started to deteriorate very quickly and soon became slippery. It was a typical mountain road with a steep drop-off on the passenger side as we slowly made our way down the hill.

I remember looking back from my dad's car as he slipped and slid down the road and watching nervously as my mom tried to navigate the same road in the car just behind him. She would get stuck for just a minute and then move forward trying desperately to stay up with dad who was having the same difficulties just ahead of her. What I remember however is not the difficulty of the drive but a

statement one of the other scouts made from the backseat of our car. The scout said, "I'll bet Mrs. Dickson is trying not to look stupid in front of you," Doc." Dad said, "I'll bet she is not even thinking about me right now. She is concentrating on what she has to do to get those kids safely home!"

I think the reason I remember that drive in such vivid detail is because of my dad's comment. It taught me the great respect my dad has for my mom. He trusted her completely with the task at hand and knew that her focus would be on exactly what it needed to be on in a very difficult situation. His statement gave me a new kind of admiration for my mom. Suddenly she was not just mom, but she was her own person with her own skills and her own successes. Mom became more whole that day as I saw her in an entirely new light.

That one circumstance did not define my mom for me but it did give her salt. It added flavor to who she is. It let me understand more completely the love and admiration my dad has for her and it added a depth to her that, while it was always there, suddenly became visible to me! In that moment, my mom transcended the role I had always put her in, the role of my mom, my caregiver, the person who had always been there to provide for my needs and the needs of the family and she became more whole. She was a person in her own right and more than just a mom. In that moment I saw her through my father's eyes and recognized in her some of what he had known was always there.

In that afternoon drive my mom became an icon for me. Icons are interesting. We see them around the church and sometimes we think about them, sometimes they are just there. On Ash Wednesday we burn the palms from last year's Palm Sunday and as we see the smoke we remember our sins. We look into the smoke and it becomes for us our actual sin being burned away. The smoke is an icon, an image that when we stare long enough at it becomes something else entirely.

Icons are not idols. Idols are things we worship. God tells us in the 10 commandments that we are not to have idols. We are not to put false gods before Him. Icons are not things we worship, but they are things that allow us to focus on our worship more completely. Icons help us to recognize what God intends us to see. Icons are not wholeness but they allow us to expand our limited vision to see wholeness. Icons are where we meet the Apostle Paul this morning.

Paul, as he travels along is frustrated by a woman possessed. This slave is possessed by demons and the men who "own" her see the potential to make money. Paul looks and instead sees the chains. Paul does not literally see chains, but the chains are an icon for the situation the woman finds herself in. As Paul looks at her and stares intently at her situation he recognizes something more in her. He sees the exploitation she is experiencing. He recognizes the abuse of her situation. He knows this circumstance of her life is not of God and he reacts to it.

As just a brief aside, but one we should all be aware of, no act of slavery is an act of God! No person is intended to be owned or used by another. Throughout our history, men have exploited women for their potential to produce economic gain. Prostitution is typically a male dominated industry. Men organize and set up channels of distribution for the sole purpose of making money from the sexual gifts of women. This activity is not from God. Pornography is typically a male dominated industry. It enslaves millions of women and men who are exploited sexually. It addicts millions more and affects their ability

to function effectively in our world. Human trafficking is typically a male dominated industry in which millions of women are abducted and traded or sold each year. These women are sold and exploited for financial gain. These abuses of women and men enslave their souls and further enslave our society and are not from God!

Paul looked at the chains of slavery he encountered this day and recognized as he gazed into that icon that there was a great wrong here. He looked through the chains and saw a wholeness that was possible. He prayed and God responded. The woman was set free of her bondage and was allowed to pursue the wholeness and abundance of life God intended for her.

Greed is however, a powerful motivator. The men who saw the potential for profit disappear as the demon came out of the woman were infuriated with Paul. They cast him into chains with trumped up charges and allegations against the state. There is a touch of irony in the events of the day. The woman who was chained by the shackles of slavery found herself free while Paul, who was free because of the power of Jesus Christ in his life now found himself chained. The icon of these chains is exactly where the gospel passage from John meets us today!

Look at the very first verse of our text for this day. As Jesus prays, he asks not only on behalf of the disciples gathered with him at that moment, but on behalf of all who will come to believe. He prays in that moment of his trial not only for Peter and James and John and the others who will spread the "Good News" but he prays for Paul whom he doesn't even know. He prays for all who come to believe because of the willingness of generations to share the word of God's great love for all the world!

In that moment of Paul's gaze upon the chains of slavery, he experiences the power of that prayer. He experiences the fullness of that prayer because the prayer goes on. The prayer is specific. Jesus prays for all who will come to believe in order that "they might become one." The oneness is Jesus real prayer. In his request, he is asking God to unite the believers into a force powerful enough to accomplish God's will. As I have mentioned several times in this Easter season, God's will is not some abstract concept. It can be found clearly stated and specifically understood in John 6 at verses 37 going forward. The will of God is that nothing of what He created should be lost but that it should all be restored!

God's will for our redemption is the reason Jesus prays for our unity. He knows that only in our willingness to become one in Him can we experience the fullness of God's desire to be in relationship with us. We learned that last week as we heard in John 14 that those who love Him will keep his word and the father will love them and He and the Father will come and make their dwelling with them! It is that unity that Jesus prays for today in this prayer with His disciples as he prepares to face His passion! The incredible reality of the prayer however is that He not only prays it for them but for all!

Jesus prays for Paul in that moment and He also prays for us! He prays that Paul will be faithful to the word he has heard and that he will love God through that word and that he will be moved by that word to respond to the injustice he sees and that he will be willing to trade places with those who are enslaved by people and become chained himself! That is also Jesus' prayer for us! That we may become one with Paul, that we may become one with Peter, with James, with John, with all the faithful who

have so completely shared the “Good News” Jesus’ prayer is that we will remember that we stand on the shoulders of giants! We who bear witness to our faith in God today stand not only on what we have come to know of God’s grace and love but also on what generations before us have stood for, believed in and even been willing to be chained for! As we look through the generations we see the icon of our faith that points back to the One who was willing to pray for us even in the moment of His passion, suffering and death!

Jesus goes on to remind God that the glory God has given to Him, He has given to us. Glory in this instance means recognition. We are not recognized in the sense that we are made famous, but we are recognized as those who are willing to stand up for and speak for those who are regarded as “less than” the rest. Paul is glorified as he sees the chains of slavery and speaks a word to invite freedom.

In what ways are we glorified? How do we allow others to look at the generations who have gone before us, the generation we live in, the Christianity we profess and see the living God? How are we icons for the faith we profess in the One True God? I think that answer comes this morning from our mothers. Our answer lies in “A Mother’s Hope!”

Moms don’t want fame for their children! Most women when their children are born hope for health and happiness for them. There are some who conspire to greatness for their children, but most hope only that their children learn to live in a world that will beat them, batter them, bruise them at every turn in such a way as to find peace. Mothers want their children to be glorified, to be recognized as people who can learn to love one another, have successful relationships, good friends and a family that continues to support and encourage them in their times of joy and in their times of sadness. A Mother’s hope is for her children to be glorified by their genuine concern for the future of the world and for the work they can do to bring about that future!

That glory that moms seek for their children doesn’t happen because God sends them on far away missions or into places of grave danger. That may be the case for some, but for most of us, that glory comes right where we are. As Jesus prays this morning, “That I may be in them and you in me so that they may be completely one!” Our glory comes as we keep His word and as Jesus takes up residence with us right where we are! Our glory comes as we become one with Him and with those who love Him as we do!

In Jesus’ prayer a Mother’s Hope is recognized as we not only become One with God but one with one another and in our unity we become prepared to live and love in a world that does not want to love at all. Jesus’ prayer invites the world to know something different. It invites the world to know that indeed God breaks into the world and in this instance, God sent His Son! The world in Jesus’ day did not receive him. In John chapter 1 the evangelist reminds us that His own people rejected him but to those who would receive Him and believe in His name, the father would love them and allow them to become Children of God! What more could a mother hope for than that her children know the grace and love of God in Jesus Christ.

As Jesus continues his prayer, he asks that those who are his see His glory, that they be with him so they can know how God recognizes him, so they can know the depth of the Father’s love for Him. He asks

this not only so they can be at the table with Him when he shares His eternal food, but he asks so that they might be know His glory in the very moment it is given. Jesus wants His disciples, all of us, to witness His passion, his suffering, his death so we can know that His glory comes from His willingness to serve even to the cost of His life. Jesus wants His followers to know that true glory, true recognition comes not because of wealth or power but because of what we do with that power!

God does not care how much money we make or how much wealth we accumulate in this world! God cares what we do with that wealth. I read recently that the current generation of people who are preparing to pass away have saved over 9 trillion dollars that is amassed in stocks, bonds, and savings accounts. When they die, this money will transfer to their heirs who have been taught to save that money and wealth in order to continue to accumulate more!

As we gather this morning, more than 300 children will starve to death in our world. God is inviting us to where Jesus sees ministry need. How much of that 9 trillion dollars might be used to save lives in a ministry to the hungry, or to the homeless, or to the sick, or to those who are abused or victimized or enslaved? The point is that as Jesus prays, he wants us to know that his prayer is not for our ease and comfort but for our willingness to serve, our willingness to receive this Glory that God has given him because of God's great love from him from before the foundation of the world!

Jesus wants us to know that His glory comes from His willingness to serve and that we are to be glorified in the same way! We are called to remember that "Our daily bread" is all we need and all we ask for. As disciples of Jesus we are called into ministry with Him and we are called into that ministry together so that we might be "One" together with Him and with the Father! A mother's hope is for this kind of relationship, a relationship of unity and closeness. Mothers strive for this unity in their families so that we can know it in our lives!

As my mom drove down that hill her focus was not on what I needed in the car ahead of her, but on how she could serve the ones who were passengers in the car she was driving. She wanted their safety, their future and she put aside all else in the world in that moment and gave her undivided attention to that quest. She was serving those who were with her right where she was and it was her determination to accomplish that service that my dad recognized in her even before she found herself in that situation.

That sense of purpose added a new dimension to the view I had of my mom and it adds a new dimension to the ministry I believe God is calling us to here at Shepherd's Grace. Mom's focus was joined with dad's focus and both were focused not on themselves but on the immediate needs of others in the place where they were! Isn't that the focus we are called to in this place, in this moment, in this time?

Here at Shepherd's Grace you have heard me say we only have two rules of ministry. The first is that we do no harm! In so far as we are able, we must always seek to look at the needs of others and think not only about how we can help them, but also about how we can help them without hurting them or others. We are not called to be Robin Hoods where we take from the rich and give to the poor. Rather we are called to give to the rich and the poor alike so that all might be one in Jesus Christ even as we are one in Jesus Christ.

When we provide our ministry meals here on Thursday nights, we do not ask for a bank statement or statement of net worth to determine whom we will serve. Instead we say that all are welcome! WE know that some come not because they are too poor to eat elsewhere, but they come because they need the food that fellowship provides! We welcome them! We also know that that meal might be the only meal others get all day long. We invite them to eat, not just a meager portion that is enough to get by, but to eat until they are filled and to, as I say to the children who come to receive communion, "Taste and see that God is good!" We don't have to tell them about God's love in that moment! We have shown them God's great love right where we are! We are that love! We are God's glory and we do not withhold that glory from anyone! We sincerely try to do no harm!

Our second rule of ministry is that we never do ministry alone. We gather together on Sunday morning to pray and worship, but during the rest of the week, we continue to gather together! If I come into your home to visit we are together. If we meet for Bible Study, we are together! If we meet as youth group or in Sunday School, or to deliver food or transport someone who needs a ride to work, we are together. When we do any of these things we fulfill the request Jesus makes in His prayer that we might see his glory in the Love God has for Him from before the foundation of the world! We are not alone, but we are where He is and we are together in our willingness to serve others not because of anything we do but because of everything He has done in us! We do not do ministry alone.

In that moment when we work together, we allow the world to see that God has sent Him and has loved us even as He has loved His only begotten son! In that moment, God's love is in us and Jesus is in us and we are completely one in Him! That unity is a mother's hope and it is symbolized in the chains the apostle sees today. You see, as Paul sees the chains of the slave and recognizes a great wrong, he acts in concert with the Love of God for all of us! He seeks to set the person free not only from her physical bondage but from the emotional bondage of abuse, bitterness and hatred! The world reacts to that as the world will. It lashes out against that which might diminish its perceived position of wealth and power and places Paul in chains to prove its strength!

The ironic and iconic thing however is that the chains are what Paul sought all along. He did not want to be enslaved as the woman was enslaved, but he did want to be enslaved by God's love. The chains that were placed on him were never chains of bondage, but they became chains of great love, the love Jesus has for the world, the Love Paul was called to share and he willingly accepted those chains in order to secure the freedom of another.

Through those chains, in prison, Paul was able to share His faith with another person and together they came to a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ! "Those who love the dream of family more than their own family may well destroy the latter even though they have no desire to do so." Sometimes we are enslaved by our vision of what we think family is, what we think mothers are, what we think others are or should be. When we fail to allow for the fullness of another person to shine through we have subverted the truth of that person. A mother's hope is that her son or daughter might be allowed to choose the chains of love in order to live into the truth of their lives. When we try to take away the chains because they do not fit our image of ministry we fail to recognize the fullness of God's plan!

Families, churches, relationships are not about what we would like them to be, they are about what they are and as we seek to do no harm, to work together to become one, we are called to recognize the great freedom we have in God when we allow ourselves to be chained to His work because of the Love he has for us from before the foundation of the world. That love is exemplified for us today as A Mother's Hope! A hope that we will all recognize the fullness of other people and we will seek to glorify God as we recognize their full potential! Amen!