

Acts 16:16-34  
Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21  
John 17:20-26

Rev. Nathan Anderson  
Easter 7 C / Mother's Day  
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“Things My Mother Taught Me”

My mother taught me RELIGION

"You better pray that will come out of the carpet."

My mother taught me LOGIC

"Because I said so, that's why."

My mother taught me about STAMINA

"You'll sit there 'til all that spinach is finished."

My mother taught me about HYPOCRISY

"If I've told you once, I've told you a million times - Don't Exaggerate!!!"

My mother taught me about BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION

"Stop acting like your father!"

My mother taught me THE CIRCLE OF LIFE

"I brought you into this world, and I can take you out."

My mother taught me TO APPRECIATE A JOB WELL DONE

"If you're going kill each other, do it outside - I just finished cleaning!"

Actually, I found these on the internet, so most aren't direct quotes from my mother. I think most of us can relate to it anyway.

I saw my mother, Delphine, just last week up in Minnesota as she'd flown up from Arizona to attend my Uncle Ralph's funeral. He was my father Vergil's youngest brother and closest friend. Ralph was the last of six kids my grandparents raised. My Dad's and Ralph's families moved in tandem to most communities where we've lived, which is rather unusual. So while my brother Joel and sister Rachel live in the Twin Cities near my Uncle Ralph and Aunt Doris, my sister Miriam flew from Seattle, and I drove up Illinois to support Doris and the families of her four boys, our cousins. It was quite a tribute of love and faith as friends and relatives gathered from Canada, Texas and Wyoming.

The pastor at St. John's Lutheran did a good job describing my uncle's legacies of faith, personality and skills. My aunt was more the disciplinarian. Raising four boys had its challenges, and we heard the pastor tell the story of these young brothers squabbling in the back seats of a car during a long trip. Auntie Doris finally said: "Ralph; stop the car. It's time to beat the boys!" My Uncle dutifully stopped, had the four sons line up outside, facing the car, and gave each one a swat on the behind, and loaded them back in the vehicle. They behaved just fine

the rest of the journey. I'm reminded of the old "Dogpatch" cartoon when Mammy Yokum announced: "I've had all I can stand, and I can't stand no more!"

Parents hope most of the life lessons they tried to instill will stick with their progeny for a lifetime. They are challenged to set good examples for their children, and most feel a bit guilty for personal shortcomings. Our families know us intimately. Most parents pray for patience, having failed many times to demonstrate this quality. Mothers and fathers are challenged to become better people, to assume unpleasant responsibilities and tasks, enforcing household rules and dishing out consequences, worrying about broken curfews, antisocial behavior, and sickness.

Sometimes we wish we would have been kinder, more tolerant, and said less. Other times we wish we would have spoken up earlier, clamped down tighter, and enforced the rules ... not only for our personal sanity, but to teach respect, self-control, and personal responsibility so our children become better people. We can't protect our kids as much as we'd like to as they grow up. As important as we are to them, we become more peripheral as they mature, exploring new vistas, investing in other relationships. We were there at their beginning, and hopefully they'll be around when we're at the end of our journey. God, however, is meant to be their Alpha and Omega, their true source and destination. He made us to be a family on earth, and to be His family forever in Heaven. Like an earthly parent, God wants us to come to family gatherings and get along.

When I was growing up, it seemed like my family didn't make a very big deal out of Mother's Day. There were cards given, as well as small gifts we had made at school. But my father seemed kind of apathetic about any celebration. She was a great Mom. It seemed to me that Dad should show her more respect and romance. But my Mother never complained, accepting it all in stride.

One year I complained to her, breaking the code of silence which seemed to shroud the subject. We kids were generally not in the habit of questioning the way our parents did things. My Mother was a bit surprised, but looked at me most thoughtfully for a while. "Nathan," she said, "you need to understand something. Years ago, before you were born, your Father's mother died on Mother's Day. This makes it hard for him each year, because there is always a layer of sorrow. I know he loves me, and remember how much he loved your Grandma. Don't be angry with him. Someday you'll understand."

I wanted to know more. My Grandma, Elvira Anderson, had been the Organist for the church where my Grandpa was Pastor. While playing for Services on Easter Sunday, 1951, she had a severe stroke. Grandpa and all six adult children kept a vigil of care for weeks until she died on Mother's Day.

What followed was not the best chapter in my family's history. Grandpa retired and left the parsonage. Without his wife, he seemed to lose the will to live. The two daughters acted out their grief by swooping up the few things of value, each crying: "Mama wanted me to have this." Arguments followed, rifts developed, and years passed before these brothers and sisters were able to reconcile. I hadn't met all my Uncles and Aunts until I was a teenager. Old wounds

healed; they became close once more, and all six siblings built cabins at the same lake in Canada. We were again a family.

As a Pastor, I see what happens in families when tragedy strikes. Crises seem to make or break people. It tests their faith, their relationships, their maturity and love. My guess is my Grandparents would rather have burned their few possessions than have these cause division between their children.

I meet a lot of people who are either alienated from their siblings, or struggling with an inability to forgive old wounds. It's enough to break a mother's heart ... and the heart of God.

Every family, every church, every community has times of conflict, differences of opinions, grievances or criticisms, perhaps justly deserved. It's part of our human nature. Intimate relationships splinter apart when there is a lack of understanding, a lack of tolerance, a lack of compassion, and a lack of forgiveness. The key missing ingredients are love and respect.

In our Gospel Lesson, Jesus prays for unity among His disciples through all of life's changing seasons. He gave us this new commandment: "Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another." He prayed not only for our behalf, but for the witness and legacies to all future generations in coming to know Jesus as Lord and to honor all God's children. Imperfect people are still perfectly loved. Love hopes all things, believes all things, endures all things ... it never ends.

Jesus demonstrated loving reconciliation when it was needed the most, modeling for us:

1. UNCONDITIONAL LOVE: The child is always acceptable even when his or her behavior is not.
2. GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT: A desire to maximize each child's God-given potential & gifts.
3. DISCIPLINE: To redirect attention to the future, and not dwell on the past.
4. GUIDANCE: Teaching children how to make choices and not just make choices for them.
5. REVERENCE: Conveying great respect in honoring God, community, families, and creation.

Unity embraces differences, surpassing mere tolerance, proclaiming a common union in gratitude to recognize and claim God gifts. Growing spiritually goes far beyond mere biology, but certainly includes God's gift of family and bonds of friendship. If we have not always understood the love of our earthly parents, nor accepted their shortcomings, it's time for healing, embracing them in person or in memory to honor our Lord. Making peace with the past is the best way to bless the future.

Loving one another is not optional. It is Christ's command. When our actions have been less than loving, it's time we make confession and amends ... acknowledging how we have been blessed with the greatest love.

Amen.