

Sermon for 14 May 2023 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Sixth Sunday of Easter/Festival of the Christian Home/Mother's Day

Scriptures: Acts 17:22-31; Psalter: UMH 790: Psalm 66:8-20; 1 Peter 2:3:13-22; John 14:15-21

***"Original blessing"***

Mother's Day.

Not a long-standing Christian tradition --- but because it's so familiar to Americans, we fit it into our reflections on how to practice celebration every day, all year, in these Sundays immediately after Easter.

What comes to me this year is the idea of original BLESSING. Not original SIN.

For the past several centuries, Christianity has been stuck on Adam and Eve's FALL, in all too many ways.

We are just, in the past half-century or so, re-claiming the central doctrine of LOVE that marks both Old and New Testaments.

One of the ways to center on this theme of the creation's being good, and of God's love being the central meaning, is to look at the first woman to write a book in English. Julian of Norwich, a fourteenth and fifteenth-century mystic, has become much more significant to us, because she expressed this so powerfully...along with Thomas Aquinas, who followed soon after her and eventually gained much more status, as a male, within the church ... but it seemed proper today to let Julian have the fore this Mother's Day.

I've started around a sample of her quotes .

Looking at the Bible texts for today, we start out with Paul's sermon to the Athenians. It's moderate, tolerant, and not very exciting ... and that's a reminder to us that a big part of practicing Jesus' way is to be modest and considerate, just like your mother said. You can get farther with honey ... or however that goes ... The first-century church had to do that, and so should we.

A great deal of backing off from power, and listening to how other people talk, what's the other fellow's side, is certainly a propos for Americans in this present age ... and that attitude is founded, we Jesus people say, on the assumption that the love of God is the first word. "God saw everything and said that it was GOOD," as Genesis puts it; and all those stories of Moses, and Hosea, and even hard-driving Amos and scary Ezekiel, were there to get that point across.

Psalm 66 goes farther along the same path: "Bless our God, O peoples..." and ending with "But truly God has listened; he has given heed to the words of my prayer..." Act by that, base

every day and every act, on that. Just this week, I've been learning again what Mom taught me when I was scared in the night, or worried at school in the day: "Don't pay attention to that." Go for the good stuff. Your disciplined thought-patterns are fundamental. God can't get through a wall of negativity ... or anyway, it takes much longer, and lots more pain, if you don't control your thoughts. Acknowledge your anger, your unhappiness ... but then move on, instead of staying stuck. Thank God, and do the right, as the saying goes.

Mother's Day.

Original *blissing*.

Peter gets a little involved, insisting it's better to practice only the good stuff. That way, even if you're unjustly punished, God can work for you more efficiently. Peter also gets wrapped up in illustrations, talking about Noah and how that pre-figured Christian baptism and such ... but let's remember, we're walking through the first hundred years or so of a movement here, dealing with lots of levels of ability and many ways of thinking religiously. Not everyone was going to get straight to the point, or to see the how we got where we are, the history of humankind, the same way. That, too, Mom generally reminded me. Just like Bishop Peggy says in her new book, forget about arguing Bible with folks. We Methodists are need to remember how cheerful and open-minded John Wesley was in his theology, and how powerfully his brother Charles was at putting that into poetry and hymns. Susannah Wesley, teaching Bible to neighbors gathered in her kitchen, didn't focus on differences, of which we know there were many in sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth-century Europe, and England, with all the wars between the Puritans and the Church-of-Englanders and so on. "If thy heart is as my heart, give me thy hand," Wesley quoted scripture.

John's 14<sup>th</sup> chapter continues along this line, as he prepares the disciples for his death; and the church was able to quote him during their times of great persecution in John's own era of the first century and early second century: "And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever."

In some ways we are saying, with Easter in our vision every Sunday, "It's the Spirit that counts." Within every one of us lies this capacity to think hopefully, and take deep breaths and use all kinds of mind-and-body disciplining, which we believe comes from Christ's not going and staying gone ... He came back. Resurrection, even daily, is our song and creed.

Surely the energy-building in the early twentieth century towards women's freedom to vote, was part of the launching of Mother's Day ... Surely today we can celebrate the connection between our day-in, day-out trust in Spiritual energy, coming through Jesus as our Lord and friend... And that trust, and that push towards feminine presence in all of us, and the blending of masculine qualities with feminine ones, in each of us, and the opening up of power to all of us, have brought great improvement to this nation and, in many ways, to the world at large.

God saw that this was good. God creates the world this way. We are one family, just as we recognize more and more how varied the spectrum of sexual feeling is. Both the Gospel of John and the Letters of John push this hard. Love is the way. I will be with you. This is how people will know you belong to me.. .. that you love one another.. Have no fear...

Original BLESSING.

Is there no end to this beginning? No. Always we are just beginning. There is so much more up ahead, in the life of the Spirit we share through Jesus. Thanks be to God. Amen.