

Some Thoughts Perhaps Appropriate for Mother's Day
2 Timothy 1:1-7

Helene had four children, but mother-child relationships were always difficult for her, perhaps because her own mother had died in 1928 of appendicitis, when Helene was only eight years old. So, Helene never did know what it might be like to talk to mom about a first date or a first day at high school.

Instead, Helene was left to be raised by a stern father, an old-school father born in Germany. He expected discipline and perfection. When she wrote him a letter when she was ten and away at camp, his letter in reply corrected her spelling, but made little mention of his love for her.

Helene was raised by a succession of housekeepers, for her

father traveled quite a bit. Housekeepers whose primary task was to keep the house sparkling clean, leaving little time to tend to the heart of a heartbroken girl. At an early age, she developed a love for classical music; the highlight of any year was a trip to the Boston Symphony.

When she was eighteen she traveled to Germany by ship to visit her relatives. A shipboard romance began, and ended. While she was in Germany, she received word that her father had died in a car crash. She made her way home as soon as she could, with in fact a few adventures along the way, because World War II had broken out, and some borders were closed, but she made her way to Copenhagen and then safely home.

Safely home and alone in the world. Suddenly an adult at

eighteen, her father, distant at best, now gone forever. She got married, had four children.

And as a mother, she reflected her upbringing. Not an over abundance of hugs and affection, but instruction about right and wrong, about sacrifice and caring. She made sure her children were educated and learned culture. Mozart and Beethoven and the occasional opera were constantly heard in her home.

She was not conventionally religious. She was dutiful in church work, but her faith was centered more in the wonder of the universe, in a God of creation, who created vast galaxies and ringed planets and forests and meadows and oceans.

Her God was not a warm and fuzzy God, but rather a moral

God, and a compassionate, if distant, God.

A schoolteacher, she would volunteer during the summer and in evenings in the black ghetto of the city in which she lived. Her children took notice. One night during the late '60's, after she had finished her tutoring, when race riots and rumors of race riots were in the air, she came out to the parking lot one dark night to find that six black teenagers had her car surrounded. They had been there for the entire hour she had been inside, to protect her car from possible harm. Because she was their tutor on other nights and they appreciated her.

Her children honored her and respected her. And if Hallmark never came up with a card that would fit her on Mother's Day, warm fuzzy affection was not her style, her children turned out all

right. And in fact, all felt free to follow their own path, itself a special gift that wise mothers bestow upon their children.

The oldest became a well-known resort manager and then Director of Tourism in his state, later still a college instructor. Another became an executive with Kodak, another worked in for the Social Security Administration, and her youngest son, as you might have guessed by now, in June of 2006 became the senior pastor at Ann Street United Methodist Church in Beaufort.

So what's the point of this story? I'm not sure. Because it's Mother's Day and I'm not sure what I'm supposed to preach. I don't want to preach a sermon in which women who have never had children feel second-class. Now, back in Bible days, women without children were considered second-rate because back in

those days the very survival of the human race was at stake. But not today. God gives men and women alike opportunity to live lives pleasing to him, and than can be as parents or as people who never have children.

And I don't want to preach extolling the virtues of a mother who always knows just what to say, is always patient and kind, cooks the best meals and keeps her house spotless, all the while holding down a job. Because I don't know any mother like that. And I don't know any father like that. And I'm not a father like that.

All I know are mothers (and fathers), who are aren't perfect, but that's OK. I know mothers who sometimes get tired of taking the kids to soccer and then go to a PTO meeting that night and then

help the kids with the homework. The moms I know don't all have picture-perfect marriages.

Some are single. Some have never been married. Some have kids from different fathers. Some keep houses that are not exactly spotless. Some moms aren't great cooks. As one young man said, mom cooked for us everyday, but I never learned what good cooking was until I joined the Army and went to boot camp.

I know moms who do their absolute very best, but whose kids bring more heartbreak than joy. I know moms who feel completely overwhelmed by parenting and feel like total failures. I know moms who would like to stay home with the kids, but then look at the realities of bills and mortgages and don't feel as if it

would be possible.

And for some Moms, Mother's Day is a day that brings as much heartbreak as joy. For the longest time, Mother's Day meant to my sister another occasion to wonder about the child she had given up for adoption. It took 30 years for her to receive a joyful answer. Some mothers never receive an answer. Other Mothers think of children who have died. Others of us think of Mothers who have died. And for some women Mother's Day is difficult because it reminds them again that their yearning to be a mother will never be fulfilled.

So Hallmark Cards speak of joy and warmth and blessed be the families like that. But not every family is like that. And today of all days such families need to be reminded that they, too, are

precious in God's sight and have a place in his kingdom.

The longer I live, the more I think the best message I can give for Mother's Day is to give permission for mothers and children to celebrate even if your relationship is not Hallmark Card perfect. To celebrate what is and forgive what isn't. To cherish what is wonderful and build on that, rather than focus on what is not-so-wonderful and make that the focus of your relationship.

A mother's influence isn't just in the giving of life. It is in the shaping of life, the passing on of values. That's the backdrop of our Scripture this morning. Timothy is a believer in Jesus Christ, and that faith has been born in him not through the ministry of the famous St. Paul, but through his mother and grandmother. The faith that lived in them now lives in him. I suspect that

mothers, and fathers, are more responsible for bring people to a living relationship with Christ than all the evangelists who ever lived.

I have met very few people who look back at their childhood and speak with joy at having grown up in a clean house with a neat yard. What brings joy are the memories of time spent together, of picnics and vacations, of sitting in a lap and hearing a story. As parents share their love with kids, something of Christ's love begins to live in them, I think. And so strong relationships of parent-child love become models of the divine love for us.

The gift of faith passed on to Timothy by mother and grandmother. And now, the challenge, to stir that gift up, as wood is stirred in the fire to make the flame come to life and

offer new light and new warmth. If we want kids to have faith, we must live that faith in the home as well as at church.

In my own life, I realize that I was influenced by my mother during times when she wasn't even thinking of influencing me. Her volunteering in the ghetto wasn't done as a parent. But it taught me important lessons. About the value of people who are different, about living a life not just of self-indulgence, but of service to others.

But then, what about kids whose mothers don't measure up to the ideal? Folks, that's all of us. We're imperfect kids born to imperfect parents, and we're imperfect parents who have imperfect kids (though I know some of you have grandchildren who border on perfection.) The good news is that we have

choices about how we live our lives. We have the choice to build on what is good about our upbringing, to forgive what is imperfect, and to cast aside what is destructive.

So, it's Mother's Day. Let's celebrate again that we have been given life. Let's reflect again on how strong those family influences are on our lives, far stronger, I dare say, than any other influence.

And, may we who are adults realize again the gift and responsibility of discipleship. The gift lived in Timothy's mother and grandmother, and lives in him. *But he is called to do something with it: For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.*

And on this day, and indeed every day, may we continue to build our lives on Jesus Christ, the cornerstone, to fan those flames of faith, which have come to us, either through family or from somewhere else for that matter. Not everyone is a mother or father, but all are called be mentors, examples, and witnesses to the love of Jesus Christ.

As it says in Hebrews Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. In him, let us know that we have the ability to forgive as need be, to be forgiven as need be, to let go or to hold on, as need be. In Jesus Christ, may we know again the ability to fix, to mend, to celebrate and perfect our relationships, as need be. Let us live again in the truth of his merciful and reconciling love, that our lives might bring blessing to this generation, and for generations to come. Amen.