

Luke 24:13-35
May 8, '11

"FIRST, LAST & EVERYTHING BETWEEN"

MOTHERS NEVER CHANGE.

NOW, I KNOW THAT STATEMENT SEEMS TO HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS PASSAGE, BUT THAT'S OKAY, BECAUSE TODAY IS MOTHER'S DAY & WHETHER IT HAS ANYTHING TO DO WITH THIS PASSAGE, IT HAS EVERYTHING TO DO WITH THIS DAY.

SOMEONE HAS COME UP WITH A FEW EXAMPLES TO PROVE THAT MOTHERS ARE ALWAYS PRETTY MUCH THE SAME.

CONSIDER SOME THINGS MOTHERS MAY HAVE SAID TO THEIR CHILDREN.

FROM THE BIBLE:

JONAH'S MOTHER – *"THAT'S A NICE STORY, BUT NOW TELL ME WHERE YOU'VE REALLY BEEN FOR THE LAST THREE DAYS!"*

FROM HISTORY:

PAUL REVERE'S MOTHER – *"I DON'T CARE WHERE YOU THINK YOU HAVE TO GO, YOUNG MAN. MIDNIGHT IS PAST YOUR CURFEW!"*

NAPOLEON'S MOTHER – *"ALL RIGHT. IF YOU AREN'T HIDING YOUR REPORT CARD INSIDE YOUR JACKET, THEN TAKE YOUR HAND OUT & PROVE IT!"*

AND WHAT ABOUT SOME FAIRY TALE MOTHERS:

HUMPTY DUMPTY'S MOTHER – *"IF I'VE TOLD YOU ONCE, I'VE TOLD YOU A HUNDRED TIMES NOT TO SIT ON THAT WALL. BUT WOULD YOU LISTEN TO ME? NOOOOO!"*

GOLDBLOCKS' MOTHER – *"I'VE GOT A BILL HERE FROM THE BEAR FAMILY FOR A BUSTED CHAIR. YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THIS, GOLDIE?"*

LITTLE MISS MUFFET'S MOTHER – *"WELL, ALL I'VE GOT TO SAY IS IF YOU DON'T GET OFF YOUR TUFFET & START CLEANING YOUR ROOM, THERE'LL BE A LOT MORE SPIDERS AROUND HERE!"*

YES, THERE IS AN ASTOUNDING CONSISTENCY ABOUT MOTHERS, ISN'T THERE?

BUT HOW IN THE WORLD DOES THIS FAMILIAR PASSAGE FROM LUKE'S GOSPEL ABOUT EASTER AFTERNOON CONNECT WITH EITHER THE CELEBRATION OF MOTHER'S DAY OR THE ASTOUNDING CONSISTENCY OF MOTHERS?

LET'S SEE IF WE CAN FIND OUT.

FIRST OF ALL, THIS IS A FAMILIAR PASSAGE, ISN'T IT?

IT'S ONE OF THE WARM & FUZZY PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE.

IT'S A STORY THAT HAS BEEN DEPICTED IN THE WORLD'S ART BY COUNTLESS PAINTERS.

BOTH REMBRANDT & CARAVAGGIO PAINTED SEVERAL VERSIONS & ONE BY VELAZQUEZ IS AMONG HIS MASTERPIECES.

THE PAINTING THAT PROBABLY COMES TO MIND FOR MOST OF US, THOUGH, WHEN WE THINK OF THIS STORY, IS BY ROBERT ZUND IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY.

IT'S A SERENE PASTORAL SCENE WITH LUSH GREEN TREES AND A BEAUTIFUL BLUE SKY AND WE LOOK AT JESUS & THE TWO TRAVELLERS FROM BEHIND AS THEY ARE ABOUT TO CROSS A SMALL STONE BRIDGE OVER A PEACEFUL CREEK.

THAT'S THE WAY WE THINK OF THIS EVENT, ISN'T IT – SERENE, BEAUTIFUL & PEACEFUL.

FOR OUR PURPOSES TODAY, THOUGH, THERE IS A SINGLE PHRASE THAT STANDS OUT IN THIS STORY.

IT ISN'T A PHRASE THAT REALLY AFFECTS THE FLOW OF THE STORY AT ALL & YET IT IS A REFERENCE TO SOMETHING THAT JUST HOVERS THROUGHOUT THE GOSPELS IN THE ACCOUNTS OF THE CRUCIFIXION & THE RESURRECTION.

IT'S SOMETHING THAT WE REALLY DIDN'T HIGHLIGHT THIS YEAR IN OUR CONSIDERATION OF THOSE EVENTS, BUT IT'S SOMETHING THAT'S JUST ALWAYS THERE AS YOU COME TO HOLY WEEK.

IT OCCURS ABOUT HALFWAY THROUGH THIS PASSAGE AS THE TWO COMPANIONS ARE JUST BEGINNING THEIR EXPLANATION OF WHAT HAS TAKEN PLACE OVER THE PAST THREE DAYS.

“SOME WOMEN OF OUR GROUP... WERE AT THE TOMB EARLY THIS MORNING.”

THAT, IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER, IS WHAT WE FIND IN EVERY ONE OF THE GOSPELS.

HERE IT IS – A TIME OF GREAT TERROR, SORROW & CONFUSION – IT'S EARLY IN THE MORNING OR EVEN *BEFORE* EARLY IN THE MORNING.

WHO IS IT WE FIND THERE AT THE TOMB?

WHO IS IT WHO MOVES BEYOND THE TERROR, STEPS THROUGH THE SORROW & CLEARS THEIR MINDS OF THE CONFUSION?

IT'S NOT THE DISCIPLES.

IT'S THE WOMEN.

IT'S THE FEMALE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS WHO ARE THE FIRST ONES AT THE TOMB ON THE DAY OF RESURRECTION.

GO BACK THREE DAYS TO THE HORRIBLE EVENTS AT GOLGOTHA.

WHO STUCK AROUND UNTIL THE BITTER END?

AGAIN, IT WASN'T THE DISCIPLES.

IT WAS THE WOMEN.

THEY'RE THE ONES WHO WERE LAST AT THE CROSS.

OH, THERE'S ALSO JOHN, BUT, OF COURSE, HE'S ONLY THERE IN HIS OWN GOSPEL & WHO'S TO SAY HE WASN'T DOING A LITTLE BIT OF REVISIONIST HISTORY IN PLACING HIMSELF THERE AT THE END.

AS YOU READ THROUGH THE GOSPELS, THIS IS SOMETHING THAT JUST JUMPS RIGHT OUT AT YOU.

THE WOMEN WERE THE FIRST & THE LAST TO BE THERE WHEN IT MATTERED.

SO YOU SEE, MAYBE IT'S NOT SO DIFFICULT A JUMP TO CONNECT THIS LECTIONARY PASSAGE FOR TODAY TO OUR CELEBRATION OF MOTHER'S DAY.

LUKE TELLS US, YET AGAIN, WHO WAS THERE WHEN IT MATTERED MOST.

BUT, YOU KNOW, THAT'S NOT ALL WITH THIS PASSAGE.

WE READ ABOUT THESE TWO COMPANIONS WHO MEET JESUS IN THE MIDST OF THEIR SORROW.

ONE OF THEM IS GIVEN A NAME – CLEOPAS.

THE OTHER REMAINS NAMELESS.

WHO WAS THIS OTHER PERSON WHO MET JESUS ON THE AFTERNOON OF THE RESURRECTION?

I THINK IT'S PRETTY OBVIOUS.

IT WAS CLEOPAS' WIFE.

NOW, OF COURSE, WE DON'T KNOW THIS FOR CERTAIN, BUT IT MAKES SENSE, DOESN'T IT, FOR A MARRIED COUPLE TO BE WALKING HOME TOGETHER AFTER THESE STUNNING EVENTS .

WHAT MAKES IT EVEN MORE CLEAR TO ME THAT THE OTHER PERSON INCLUDED IN THIS ENCOUNTER WAS CLEOPAS' WIFE IS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THEY GET TO THE HOUSE.

THINK ABOUT THIS A MOMENT.

IF THIS IS TWO GUYS WALKING TOGETHER & THEY GET TO THEIR DESTINATION & THE STRANGER THEY'VE MET ALONG THE WAY IS GOING TO KEEP ON TRAVELLING, WHAT ARE THEY GOING TO DO?

“HEY, NICE MEETIN’ YOU PAL. HAVE A GOOD TRIP.”

“THANKS FOR THE CONVERSATION, BUDDY. REALLY STIMULATING! CATCH YOU LATER!”

BUT IS THAT WHAT HAPPENS?

NO. THEY (OR AT LEAST ONE OF THEM) COMPELS HIM TO STICK AROUND FOR DINNER.

C’MON . DO YOU NEED FURTHER PROOF THAN THIS THAT THE OTHER TRAVELLER WITH CLEOPAS WAS HIS WIFE?!

SHE’S THE ONE WHO TALKED JESUS INTO STAYING FOR DINNER!

YES, THIS PASSAGE WORKS FOR MOTHER'S DAY.

I WANT TO BE CAREFUL HERE, THOUGH, IN HOW WE APPROACH MOTHER'S DAY THIS MORNING IN USING THIS PASSAGE.

YES, WE CAN SAY THAT WOMEN WERE THE FIRST AT THE TOMB, THE LAST AT THE CRUCIFIXION & THE ONES WHO ARE MOST LIKELY TO HAVE INVITED JESUS TO STAY FOR DINNER.

WE CAN THROW ALL SORTS OF NICE THINGS OUT TO MOTHERS & ALL WOMEN.

BUT I REMEMBER A COMMENT A WOMEN MADE AS SHE WAS REFLECTING ON WHAT SHE MIGHT HEAR FOR A MOTHER'S DAY SERMON.

SHE SAID, *“I DON’T WANT TO JUST HAVE ACCOLADES THROWN AT ME ON MOTHER’S DAY. OH, I’M NOT OBJECTING TO THE ACCOLADES. BUT I WANT MORE. I WANT TO BE CHALLENGED.”*

WELL, WOMEN, CONSIDER THE TITLE OF TODAY'S MESSAGE YOUR CHALLENGE.

“FIRST, LAST & EVERYTHING BETWEEN.”

WHO IS IT THAT FITS THAT CLASSIFICATION?

WHO’S THE FIRST AND THE LAST AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN THE BEGINNING AND THE ENDING?

IS IT NOT CHRIST HIMSELF?

WHAT DOES HE SAY IN REVELATION?

“I AM THE ALPHA & THE OMEGA, THE FIRST & THE LAST, THE BEGINNING & THE END.”

BUT I’VE ALREADY MADE THE CONNECTION BETWEEN WOMEN BEING THE FIRST & THE LAST BECAUSE OF THEIR PLACE AT THE TOMB & THE CRUCIFIXION.

SO WHICH IS IT?

IT IS BOTH & THAT, MY FRIENDS, IS AS BIG A CHALLENGE AS YOU CAN EVER BE GIVEN.

YOU – THE MOTHERS & OTHER WOMEN OF THE FAITH – ARE CALLED TO BE THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD TODAY.

NOW THAT’S A TALL ORDER – MAKE NO MISTAKE ABOUT IT!

FOR THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF THE WORLD’S POPULATION, MOTHERS ARE FIRST, LAST & EVERYTHING BETWEEN IN THEIR CHILDREN’S LIVES AS THE PERSONIFICATION OF THE LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST.

TODAY, ON MOTHER’S DAY, WE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO CELEBRATE THIS TREMENDOUS TRUTH.

MANY OF YOU KNOW THAT MOTHER’S DAY WAS FIRST DESIGNATED A NATIONAL HOLIDAY WITH A PRESIDENTIAL PROCLAMATION NEARLY A HUNDRED YEARS AGO & WAS LARGELY BASED ON THE EFFORTS OF A WOMAN NAMED ANNA JARVIS.

BUT WHAT YOU MAY NOT KNOW IS - A LA PAUL HARVEY – “THE REST OF THE STORY.”

THERE WAS AN ATTEMPT MADE TO ESTABLISH A MOTHER’S DAY OF SORTS, SOME 40 YEARS BEFORE, IN 1870.

IT WAS AN EFFORT INITIATED BY JULIA WARD HOWE WHO WROTE “THE BATTLE HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC.”

SHE SAW, FIRST-HAND, THE DEVASTATING AFFECTS OF THE CIVIL WAR & THEN BECAME EQUALLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR.

SHE CALLED FOR AN INTERNATIONAL GATHERING OF WOMEN & WROTE A PROCLAMATION THAT INCLUDED THESE WORDS:

“ARISE, THEN, WOMEN OF THIS DAY! ARISE ALL WOMEN WHO HAVE HEARTS, WHETHER YOUR BAPTISM BE OF WATER OR OF TEARS! SAY FIRMLY, ‘WE WILL NOT HAVE QUESTIONS DECIDED BY IRRELEVANT AGENCIES. OUR HUSBANDS SHALL NOT COME TO US REEKING OF CARNAGE FOR CARESSES AND APPLAUSE. OUR SONS SHALL NOT BE TAKEN FROM US TO UNLEARN ALL THAT WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO TEACH THEM OF CHARITY, MERCY, AND PATIENCE.”

INTERESTINGLY, JULIA WARD HOWE RECEIVED HER INSPIRATION FOR THIS PROCLAMATION FROM THE WORK OF ANOTHER WOMAN – A WOMAN NAMED ANNA REECE JARVIS, THE MOTHER OF THE SAME ANNA JARVIS

WHO WAS ULTIMATELY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FIRST OFFICIAL MOTHER'S DAY 40 YEARS LATER.

JULIA WARD HOWE WAS RIGHT.

IT'S WOMEN – IT'S MOTHERS – WHO ARE THE ONES WHO TEACH CHARITY, MERCY & PATIENCE TO THEIR CHILDREN.

IT'S MOTHERS WHO – LIKE CHRIST – ARE FIRST, LAST & EVERYTHING BETWEEN IN THEIR CHILDREN'S LIVES.

THE PROCLAMATION OF JULIA WARD HOWE CONCLUDES WITH THESE WORDS:

“IN THE NAME OF WOMANHOOD & HUMANITY, I EARNESTLY ASK THAT A GENERAL CONGRESS OF WOMEN WITHOUT LIMIT OF NATIONALITY BE APPOINTED TO PROMOTE THE ALLIANCE OF THE DIFFERENT NATIONALITIES, THE AMICABLE SETTLEMENT OF INTERNATIONAL QUESTIONS & THE GREAT & GENERAL INTERESTS OF PEACE.”

THINK OF ALL THAT HAS TRANSPIRED IN THE WORLD IN THE 140 YEARS SINCE JULIA WARD HOWE WROTE THOSE WORDS.

I THINK WE'D ALL HAVE TO AGREE THAT IF WE PUT MOTHERS IN CHARGE OF RUNNING THE WORLD'S AFFAIRS, IT WOULD BE A MUCH BETTER PLACE!

YES, THIS IS INDEED A DAY FOR ACCOLADES FOR MOTHERS & ALL WOMEN.

IT IS ALSO A DAY OF CHALLENGE.

THE CHALLENGE IS TO BE WHO YOU ARE CALLED BY GOD TO BE – THE FIRST, LAST & EVERYTHING BETWEEN IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS, PARTICULARLY YOUR CHILDREN.

THE CHALLENGE IS TO BE THE PERSONIFICATION OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD TODAY. AMEN.

*The Reverend Dr. Dennis R. Davenport
Eastminster Presbyterian Church
Evansville, Indiana*