

Series: "Back to The Beginnings Again"

Sermon: "Genesis of Mothering"

Text: 1 Peter 3: 1-6

RGGJR/FBCCS/5-14-23 UNEDITED

- Let me say once again: **"Happy birthing person's day!"**
- Somehow, that greeting just doesn't have the same ring to it as **"Happy Mothers' Day!"**
- Well, those of you who are **"awake"** probably understand that it feels better to say **"Happy Mothers' Day"** than **"Happy Birthing Person's Day"** only because stuck in our **violent, prejudiced patriarchal paradigms** we are used to saying the one and not saying the other.
- We simply need to listen to the better wisdom of today and we too can stop the violence perpetrated on so many by holding to an outmoded view of being a "mother."
- Meeting **Reverend Al**, reminded me that not everything on the internet is absolute truth that can be *trusted* implicitly. There are actually made-up things offered as facts when I get a search result.
- This means I will need to go back to doing research to validate what is factual. That's hard work!
- Since I personally am not always a fan of hard work when easier work will suffice, I only do this hard work for things that truly matter.
- This means, like the illustrative stories pastors told so many of to illustrate sermons in the past, my internet illustrations or citations need to be taken with a **"grain of salt"** which the internet assures me means to hear something with a skeptical attitude...which by the way the internet tells me, is a well-known saying that **most certainly** came from 77 AD when *Pliny the Elder*, translating an antidote for poison said, **"take it with a grain of salt."** (See what I did there?)
- I searched the origins of **Mothers' Day** (ON THE INTERNET—WINK! WINK!) and surprise! Surprise! The internet tells me those origins were somewhat progressive for the time—almost **"awake."**

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- Three women, Ann Reeves Jarvis, Julia Ward and Ann's daughter, Anna M. Jarvis were involved in instituting a day that honored mothers and the gift of mothering.
- Mom Jarvis was a young Appalachian homemaker who taught Sunday School to very poor children each week. According to ***The Almanac***, as an activist, she had organized Mothers' work clubs in West Virginia to combat unsanitary living conditions for these children. She was concerned with high infant mortality rates and wanted to help mothers keep their babies alive.
- Daughter Anna, pushed to memorialize her mother's efforts of "matchless service" to these poor kids and all of humanity with a day each year to commemorate her mom and the powerful role of "*motherhood*."
- The internet has spoken so we will accept this as "gospel truth"—a saying that the internet assures me arose sometime in the 13th century meaning that what one was saying was as perfectly true as the very Gospel of Jesus Christ. (*See what I did there?*)
- OK, Raleigh! I thought we were studying *Genesis*! We are, and although it may not seem like it, we still are even with all this introductory *drivel*, which the internet assures me comes from the idea of the saliva dribbling out of a mentally challenged person's mouth as they speak nonsensically. (*Uh oh! Can't use that word anymore!*)
- Admittedly, this morning I am speaking contrary to my habit of going narrative by narrative in *Genesis* as a check against emphasizing my own hobby horses by preaching only the subjects I want to preach. (*BTW: which the internet tells me means a "fixation" on a topic, which of course, comes from the idea of a child riding a toy horse over and over again*).

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- If you have looked ahead, the *Genesis* narrative for today is a story about a girl named **Dinah** who was a daughter of Jacob by her mother Leah. What happened to *Dinah* and what her father and brothers did in response might actually be a pretty good lesson on a day like today that focuses somewhat on parental influence.
- However, on a day when we dedicate little children and think especially of motherhood, it just didn't seem the best timing for the message of *Genesis 34*. Besides, Cathy and I agreed we don't know any good hymns or choruses based on the story of Dinah and the Shechemites.
- But, still, I am in *Genesis* this morning—just not *Genesis 34*.
- In a recently past sermon, I slipped in a reminder that one way Moses divided what he wrote in *Genesis* by using the Hebrew word and idea of "**tol(e)dot.**"
- Translators have sometimes struggled with how to render this word because, like many words in other languages, it has a bigger meaning than any one word we have in English.
- Basically, **toledot** means "what came out of." It can indicate what came out of a genetic line, that is, the generations of a family created by procreation. But it is also used in *Genesis 2:4* to speak of what "came out of" the "heaven and the earth" in Creation.
- It seems clear to me that *toledot* in *Genesis* is not just the description of what happened next but includes what happened next because of what came before.
- In other words, it speaks of the influence of what came before on making what comes after what it is. When applied to people and especially to families, I am speaking of **generational influence**.
- It is probably true but I haven't counted, that simply measured by word count, the narratives of *Genesis* focus more on the

generational influence of the men—of fathers—than of women—the mothers.

- Very often, as we will now see in the case of *Jacob* and his boys, we will see as great or even greater a *negative* impact for God by their generational influence than for the good.
- But, we do have some *Genesis* stories of mothers. For example, there is Sarah and the Hagar *mess*. There is Rebekah and her *unbalanced* love for Jacob over his brother Esau. And there is Rachel smugly sitting atop her stole pocket-gods and lying about it all.
- Maybe moms do get as much bad press as dads in *Genesis*. Moses certainly does not shy away from telling us their negative influence on the *toledot* that comes from them.
- So what is an appropriate lesson for mothers from *Genesis* on Mothers'—more appropriate than the next-in-line violent story of Dinah?
- Is it that mothers can be as big a failure as fathers in influencing their children for God? But, I bet you moms already knew that. I would expect you are already quite aware that you can fail at being a Godly influence with kids.
- If that were the lesson for mothers today, you might have preferred I had gone ahead with the Dinah story. You probably don't need any emphasis on your shortcomings as an admittedly imperfect mom.
- Instead, let me give you the *toledot* (the what came out of—what resulted from—the generational influence) of just one of these women I have mentioned, Sarah.
- We have it in a NT letter we studied together not long ago—**1 Peter 3:1-6**
- It is in a context of following Jesus Christ's example of humble, SUBMISSIVE obedience to the Father's purposes.

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- It is focused on Sarah's relationship to her husband but I'll assume this attitude of hers toward their father influenced her kids—I'll assume this is part of the *toledot* of Sarah—what came from her for God's purposes by being a mother *imperfect* as she was.
- **READ 1 Peter 3:1-6**
- If you are off put by the idea of *quiet submission* to an imperfect Abraham somehow limiting the influence of Sarah's motherhood, look later at Paul's writing to Timothy for the church of Ephesus in 1 Timothy 2:15. The apostle makes it clear that motherhood has such an influence that it can "save" a woman from the need to *demand attention* in order to be *influential*.
- Motherhood produces a *toledot* even if it does it differently than a man and fatherhood might produce that generational influence. I have concluded motherhood can produce a greater influence on the *toledot* of a family.
- Like my sons do today, I used to toss my children high in the air and listen to them giggle as they came down into my arms. I used to grab them by two legs or two arms and swing them round and round until they almost barfed. When I stopped they say—"Again Daddy! Again Daddy!" I played with them as if they were unbreakable.
- Now when my daughter's-in-law now hand me their newborn babies—my grandkids—in the hospital room, I relent a take the babies gingerly one time for the picture. Then I quickly hand them back to a mother—any mother—actually any woman close by.
- I've probably never even told the mothers this but this behavior is a metaphor for me. I am very aware of what it is saying inside me.
- Babies are fragile, breakable, too soft, too flexible—so easily "moldable" even into the wrong shape by my clumsy, insensitive hands.

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- It's not that I don't love those babies. It is that I have learned how easily I can hurt them. That physical picture, after watching my influence, my *toledote* being written, over the years, is a statement of caution. I am not perfectly made to love that baby as any of those women around me.
- I have thought deeply about this and have come to realize I don't really remember a single sermon a man ever preached to me on a Sunday morning. However, I cannot forget sitting in my grandmother's kitchen talking about Jesus and the Bible. We talked as she searched for something to feed me and could only concoct a "spaghetti" out of macaroni noodles, mozzarella cheese and ketchup. To this day, when I am torturing myself to keep from eating carbs, the thing I long for is macaroni, cheese and ketchup.
- I can hardly remember a spanking my dad gave me for good reason. However, with my mom I can recall her reading Rachel Carson's A Silent Spring from the monthly book club book selection that influenced me to read and most of all talking about deeper things of God than any pastor I ever heard talk about on Sundays. We still do those long theological discussions to this day.
- So whose *toledot* am I? Whose influence did I come from?
- I have watched Mary raise kids—her own and so many others—and now her grandkids and the grandkids of others. I am eternally grateful, that by God's grace, when I look at those kids it is her influence I see stamped on them way more often than mine.
- Whose *toledot* are they? Thank God the *toledot* of a Godly woman who mothered them.
- I watch my three daughters-in-law and my grandkids. These kids are most certainly a mix of mom and dad. However, I am so grateful for

those mothers because it is their influence that I see in my grandkids that looks so much like Jesus.

- Whose *toledot*? Whose influence shapes them.
- I began this morning playing a bit with the idea of "*Happy Birthing Persons' Day*" for a reason.
- There is likely no one listening to me right now that doesn't think this way of speaking about today is plain old silly.
- Mothers give birth. I will add women, even those who have not given physical birth—women are made by God in a special way—and that is not simply physically—to be able to ***mother children***—to influence young human beings to shape what comes after them—to write *toledots* of Godliness.
- Mothers—the motherhood of women whispers life-shaping lessons before a loud pastor or teacher ever gets to say an emphatic word.
- Yes, this is not only a great gift and great opportunity; it is a great responsibility and maybe even a heavy burden.
- I took you to Sarah's NY *toledote* to make the point with which I will finish. Sarah was not an example of a good wife and mother because she was a perfect woman—a perfect mother.
- Sarah was given as an example because she demonstrated that her ***hope was in God***.
- Again, she didn't always have this hope perfectly but she grew and grew in this hope.
- She could have made herself noticed—made her influence greater by playing up the world's ways of influence but she didn't. Peter said she made herself the beautiful woman, wife and mother she was by people—her husband—her kids seeing her hope in God.

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- A **mother**, as no other, can start the direction of a toledot concerning her children—an ongoing generational influence that reads, "**Their hope was in God.**" Quite a *toledot*—quite an influence!
- It was the way God designed it to be. This is why the Evil One and his world must attack the idea of "**motherhood**" as it is defined and illustrated in God's Word.
- The enemy must destroy "hoping in God" because this brings God glory. Where better to start that destruction than at the laying of its foundations by mothers and motherhood?
- Two destructive deceits are these:
- **First**, "Mothering is nothing special—nothing different. It is not a uniquely important part of God's creation design. In fact, being a mother may waste your life. So, don't waste your life."
- **Second**, "You must be perfect to be a good mother. You can't ever get it wrong—can't make a mistake—can't sin or you will fail. You can't be growing. You already have to be there. So, you should give up even trying."
- The reality is that mothering the next generations is as influential a human privilege as ever given by God for his glory. It writes toledots of influence for generations
- And, the reality is that **mothering** is at its best when it is a reflection of a woman's hope in God even when—especially when that mother fails but God doesn't let her go or give up on her ever.
- **Mothering** teaches the next generation both the reality of God-given purpose and of God-given redemptive love.
- No wonder Satan hates **Mothers' Day**!