

In honor of Mother's Day I thought I'd start out with a few quotes about mom.

Men are what their mothers made them.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother.

—Henry Ward Beecher

The phrase "working mother" is redundant.

—Jane Sellman

I remember my mother's prayers and they have always followed me. They have clung to me all my life.

—Abraham Lincoln

Whatever else is unsure in this stinking dunghill of a world a mother's love is not.

—James Joyce

God could not be everywhere, so he created mothers.

—Jewish Proverb

If momma ain't happy, ain't nobody happy.

-Ron Estep

Honor your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

Deuteronomy 20:12

"Honor your mother..." Have you ever thought much about what is wrapped up in that phrase? I think in a way the conduct of my life has always been with a desire to honor my mother. I obeyed my mom, most of the time. I realized that my behavior, as I was growing up, would always reflect back on my mom. So I treated other people with respect, I did the right thing; I helped others; all because I wanted to honor my mother.

One of the reasons I am the person I am today is because I've always wanted to honor my mother.

Now honor is not a word that we use much in our culture today; but for a few weeks now it is a word that has stuck in my head. I listened to a sermon about honor as I ran recently and it was if God was speaking to me about the honor I demonstrate to others.

I actually came under great conviction for failing to show honor to someone that God has placed over me. As I have lived with that word I have found myself saying it repeatedly. And I think that it is no coincidence that the word honor is often associated with the word we are looking at today: love.

Last week we began a look at our mission statement, Love God and Love Others. What I hope that you took away is *the power of our relationships to demonstrate to others that we have experienced the love of God*. That is why we said last week that **the goal of Jesus disciples is relationship, not rule keeping**.

Not coincidentally, all of this comes together in a conversation that Matthew records in his historical account of Jesus life. So if you have your Bible, open it to Matthew 15.

Last week I mentioned that Jesus ran up against the rule-keeping Pharisees on many occasions because he and his disciples didn't follow all of their 600+ rules. As far as Jesus was concerned, demonstrating the love of God in our relationships is far more important than rule-keeping. For Jesus, *our demonstration that we have experienced the love of God will go a long way toward creating an environment where people will grow to act and think more like God desires.*

And so on this occasion in Matthew 15 Jesus confronts the Pharisees for keeping their rules, but failing to capture the importance of relationships as a place in which we demonstrate that we have experienced the love of God. So as Jesus talks to the Pharisees, I want you to listen for the word honor.

Matthew 15:1-9

What Jesus was confronting here with the Pharisees was a tradition that allowed people to circumvent the responsibility to take care of their parents financially by declaring their wealth a gift to God. You could think of it as a trust fund for God so that you could hide your money from the government while still enjoying the fruit of your labors! This was rule-keeping above relationships to the extreme!

Here is the first thing I want you to take away from this encounter that Jesus had. If you want to find a way around relationships you can always bend the rules to get what you want.

The Pharisees bent the rules to their own advantage; negating the importance of relationship. We often fall prey to the same scheme. We know that we are to love one another, even our enemies; but we often dishonor others with hateful words in the name of a cause we believe to be just.

We see it in extremes like the Westboro Baptist Church from Kansas. But we also do it when we dishonor our elected leaders. In 1 Peter 2:13-17, Peter challenges the Christians to submit to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king... and then he wraps it up with; Show proper respect to everyone... fear God, honor the king."

Here is the problem; many who call themselves Christians, who claim they stand on the word of God, act in ways that are less than what Jesus expects of those who are his disciples.

Listen to this sobering statement that I recently read in the book, *Barefoot Church*, by Brandon Hatmaker:

'Christianity would be incredibly influential in our culture if Christians consistently lived their faith. Most non-Christians don't read the Bible, so they judge Christianity by the lives of the Christians they see. The problem is that millions of Christians don't live like Christians.'

Ouch!

Above all, what that comment points out is the fact that too many 'Christians' have yet to be transformed by the word of God. If we were transformed it would be evident in our demonstrating love to others.

What if Christians started to live in a way that honored all people? What if Christians were leaders in civil discourse about areas in which people disagreed? What if Christians put their money, time and attention into discussing issues that we say are important as opposed to finger pointing and using hurtful words?

Sort of like Martha Mullen, of Richmond, VA. Martha, was dismayed this past week by the protests over the burial of the Boston Bombing suspect. Martha said, "It portrayed America at its worst." So Tuesday, while sitting in a Starbucks it hit her that she could be the one to end the controversy. She said in an interview with the Boston Globe, 'Jesus says to love our enemies...So I decided I'm the person who needs to do something.'

And that is exactly what she did. She put all the pieces together to end the controversy and acted on her faith. Loving others, even our enemies, is what Jesus demonstrated. Martha Mullen was transformed. She lived her faith; and as a result Martha Mullen is a disciple of Jesus we should follow.

What if we put our relationships, in which we demonstrate that we have experienced the love of God; above rule-keeping? What if, instead of verbally berating others who don't agree with us, we showered them with the love of God? If we truly loved others the way that Jesus asks, our impact on the culture would yield far more positive results.

In this account from Matthew, Jesus quotes the Old Testament prophet Isaiah and says: *You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied, 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.'*

Do you know the origin of the word hypocrite? A hypocrite is an actor; someone who plays a role on stage, in front of people, but is actually a different person off stage. So Jesus was saying to the Pharisees that they were actors, they portrayed a role when on the public stage but were really someone else when no one was watching.

But God is always watching; and so the prophet Isaiah speaking on behalf of God says: you honor me with your lips (you talk the talk), but your heart betrays the fact that who you are on the inside is not someone who has been transformed by the love of God.

If we are going to truly love others it has to come from inside, where our hearts are changed by our experience with the love of God. In other words, if we want to honor God with more than our lips, then we need to experience an inward transformation that is lived out in our love for others, all others, *not* just the ones we like. No one can say they love God and not love others. That is what John said in 1 John 3:11-17. How can we say we love God, but not love one another?

So it is time to stop play acting and start demonstrating that the power of God's love is transforming us from the inside out!

Jesus said in John 13:34-35 that he was giving us a new command, to love one another, as he loved us. And it is in our genuine love for one another that Jesus says the world will know that we are his disciples.

The Apostle Paul, who experienced the love of God on the Damascus Road when he met Jesus and had his life radically transformed- going from a persecutor of the Christians to a purveyor of the Christian faith; told the Christians in Rome that that kind of love needed to be evidenced in their lives.

Writing to the Christians in Rome, where being a Christian was anything but easy; he told them that the way they lived would be the demonstration of God's love that could transform culture. Look at what he says:

Romans 12:9 *Love must be sincere.* Now before we go any further let me tell you something about that word sincere. It is from the same root word that Jesus used when he called the Pharisees, hypocrites. So Paul is saying love must be without hypocrisy, without play-acting.

Then Paul says *Honor one another above yourselves.* Sounds like Jesus statement, love your neighbor as you love yourself. And then Paul makes a list of all the things that disciples who have experienced the love of God in their hearts will do to live transformed lives.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

Live in harmony with one another.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.

Live at peace with everyone.

Do not take revenge.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Can you imagine the transformation in our culture if that is how all of Jesus disciples actually lived?

Jesus disciples would listen twice as much as they talk. And when they listened they would seek to understand rather than try to convince someone they are right.

And Jesus disciples would seek to overcome evil, not with angry words, but with words and actions that demonstrate God's love is transforming us from the inside out. When we see evil we would act to bring love and seek peace instead of inspiring hate. We could use more people like Martha Mullen who sought peace instead of inspiring hate.

Jesus disciples would seek forgiveness from those they have dishonored with their words and actions. Imagine the impact if Christians who used harsh, disrespectful language sought to right their wrong by asking forgiveness. People would want to know what happened to us! And we could tell them that we've been transformed by the love of God and are now seeking to honor others.

That was the other story that caught my attention this past week. Libby Phelps-Alvarez is the granddaughter of Fred Phelps, the founder of the Westboro Baptist Church. She recently

appeared on Anderson Cooper's program to talk about her experience in the church and what it has been like since she left 4 years ago.

Listen to this quote: I thought the only way to love my neighbor was to tell them that their sins were taking them to hell. I honestly thought I was doing the right thing.

She is now apologizing to the people she hurt. She is seeking to be transformed by the love of God so that she can love others the way Jesus demonstrated loving others.

So here is my challenge this morning, will you join me in a campaign to honor one another? Think of it as a way to honor your mother!

Start by recognizing that your ability to truly honor others will begin by knowing that you and others are both precious in the sight of God. Jesus died for all of us; that makes each person priceless!

Some people are going to be harder to honor than others; but remember that by your seeking to honor others you will be demonstrating the love of God. And as we've said, as that person comes to know and experience the love of God through you; it changes them. And it will also change us into the people God desires us to be.

That will mean that we need to let the word and love of God truly transform us from the inside out. So I challenge you to read Romans 12 every day this week. As each of us begins to be transformed I believe that we will start to see our relationships transformed, our communities transformed, and maybe even our culture will be transformed in time.

Let's do it because it is the right thing to do, because it will honor God; but also because it will be the best Mother's Day gift you'll ever give your mother!