

Pastor Roy's Sermon from May 11, 2014 (Mother's Day)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[Today is Mother's Day.] Thank you to all you mothers who gave of yourselves, sacrificed, encouraged, challenged, and set your own stuff aside so that your children might come to the fullness of their gifts and opportunities. I'm guessing for most, mothering pushes you to the brink of your sanity. Likely, to the point where you wondered if you were up to all of this. Feelings of inadequacy and doubt and uncertainty. Worries about outcomes and if you were doing what needed to be done.

Fortunately, all these frustrations and fears were mingled with moments of gratitude, and wonder, and delight over the miracle which was occurring right before your eyes and in your heart. I'm sure in the process you learned about your own mother. You discovered abilities and graces which were present inside of you all along, just waiting for the opportunity to grow and bloom.

Thank you also to those who have taken the time and energy to mother other children who were not born of you. You saw the opportunity, great or small, and you made it your business to be present in a life forming way for a child or adult. Some of the lives whom you touched have been profoundly changed--usually without you even knowing. Others were quietly nurtured for good, made stronger and more compassionate for your presence, words, and actions.

Each of us has been mothered by many--enriched by a variety of gifts, love, hope, and courage. We have learned much, from many.

Mothers are the gateway to life. They give us life at birth. They teach us how to live and love. Yes, they are imperfect as we all are. But they have shared the graces they were given to the best of their ability.

In the liturgical calendar, today is also Good Shepherd Sunday. Today's passage from John reveals Jesus as the gate of the sheep. Here is the gate through which we discover God and life and love. Much like with our mothers, Jesus is the gateway into life. John contrasts Jesus with thieves and bandits which steal, kill, and destroy. A contrast of two ways of leading--abundant compassion versus greed, fear, and violence.

The context for this gospel passage in which Jesus speaks of sheep, gatekeeper, and shepherd is Jesus setting free a blind man to fully function in a community. Then the social and political powers who heard about it were afraid of this gospel of healing and freedom and inclusion. They were much more comfortable with everyone staying in their place. In contrast, Jesus calls the people to take their place, to step up to honor, dignity, and mercy in love.

Jesus is the gate through which we find this life, even as mothers bring us life and hope. Salvation is Jesus restoring hope to this man who had to depend on others for every need he had. Before he met Jesus, the blind man was isolated in darkness. He will now have food security and can provide for his own lodging. Socially, he now belongs. Social wellness is part of the big picture of salvation. Jesus is always concerned with the big picture today, not a one-way ticket to some other time and place.

In proclaiming the Good News of God's mercy, Jesus joins his voice with the prophets of the Hebrew Bible. In both testaments, God calls us to invite those on the fringe to come closer. This is what's going on in the passage from Acts in which people were selling their excess and providing for the needs of all.

In the love of Christ, we reach out to the social and economic poor. With our contributions to alleviate world hunger, malaria, and poverty in general, we are participating in the salvation of Christ. We bring the compassionate justice of God to our neighbors--both those we've met and not. We do this by donating resources to provide for those who do not, through no fault of their own, have the resources which we have.

Chronic hunger, disease, water rights, land possession, civil wars and natural disasters leading to the homeless, landless refugee. And we are coming to realize that global climate change brought on by the burning of fossil fuels and other human behaviors is not a political or environmental issue but a scientific reality, unless we wish to part ways with 95-99% of the global scientific community and travel back in time several hundred years in which the earth was the center of the universe and kings and bishops defined reality in elements outside of their expertise and to the benefit of their institutions.

Will our great, great grandchildren look back to our generation as one in which we as Americans chose our conveniences and dominant presence in the world today over the deliberate choices necessary to reduce our impact on the environment? Our choices on behalf of the most fragile elements of creation and our poorest global neighbors are a participation in the salvation of Christ. Let me repeat that since that is the point I wish to make on this issue.

The work of justice and mercy in our world is sacred. This is the salvation of Christ which Jesus demonstrated in healing a blind man and in defending him from the reactions of those too fearful to understand compassion and mercy.

Jesus Christ is a Gate into the fullness of life for us and for all of creation. May we faithfully follow him into his green pasture, may his mercies allow us to save others from the thieves and bandits and their actions to steal, and kill, and destroy. May we follow him into this abundant life which lies before us and is all around us.

Thanks be to God for our mothers. Thanks be to God for our Lord Jesus Christ who is our gateway into the fullness of life in God's mercy. Amen.