

“Mother’s Love”

The Rev. Drew Willard  
UCC at The Villages, FL  
May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015  
*6<sup>th</sup> of Easter/Mothers Day*

1John 5:1-6

John 15:9-17

[Jesus said,]

*“This is my commandment,*

*that you love one another as I have loved you.”*

*John 15:12-14*

Let us pray.... O God,

Thank you for the universal truths you teach us –

especially about how love works in our world.

Thank you for the examples you provide of those who makes themselves available to serve you and therefore, the greater good for us all.

Amen

Mothers’ Day happens on Sundays every May

and it’s one of those holidays that is not actually part of Church tradition,

but still the occasion to celebrate the role that women have played in the life of the Church.

Sometimes there is an opportunity to deal with

some of the deeper theological questions as well, for example...

A child asked his mother,

"Where do we come from? How were people born?"

So his mother said,

"Adam and Eve made babies, then their babies became adults and made babies, and so on."

Now you have heard the expression, ‘Trust, but verify’ –

so, this child went to his father, to ask the same question, and dad said,

"First, we were monkeys. Then, we evolved to become like we are now."

The child ran back to his mother and said,

"You lied to me! Dad said we came from monkeys!"

His mother replied,

"No, your dad was talking about his side of the family."

The cover art for our bulletin today is a copy of a print I bought in Israel in 1981,

while visiting an artist colony in the town of Zafat near the Lebanese border.

As you can see, it is a ‘Nativity’ scene with this sentiment:

*It doesn’t matter if you were born in a barnyard,*

*if you come out of a swan’s egg.*

This image of Mary & Baby Jesus is an important icon for us as Christians,

symbolizing God’s love for us, and at the same time reflecting

a universal archetype of a mother’s unconditional love for her child.

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An example of this imagery that predates Christianity comes from classic Egyptian mythology.

Oddly enough, it is a goddess named Isis who represented ideal motherhood in ancient Egypt, often portrayed cradling her son Horus the Sky God.

That is in sharp contrast with the terrorist organization of our time called ISIS who are without mercy for anyone's children.

Another example, though, of the universal symbolism of a mother's love comes from the Chinese language.

Such that, when the character for "woman" is combined with the character for "child", the word that is formed is "hau" – which means "good".

So, a "woman with child" is *good* – and not just as hope for the future, but it is the goodness of unconditional love that an ideal mother's love personifies...

Another illustration of how the imagery of a mother & child can transcend culture as a universal concept comes from the 1986 movie called, "The Mission".

It is a drama about the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Catholic missions in South America to Native people converted to Christianity and governed by Jesuit missionaries.

The film begins with violence as Indian warriors carry a European missionary crucified on a cross through the jungle and set him adrift on a river that carries him over the falls to his death.

Apparently, they understood the "Crucifixion" part of Christ's story, but they didn't get the "unconditional love of God" part.

Soon after though, another missionary follows, and he paddles a canoe right up to those same falls, and slowly scales the rocky cliffs to enter the jungle.

There, he finds a clearing where he sits down to unpack... an oboe, which he assembles and begins to play a beautiful melody ("Nolo Fantasia") that lilts through the forest depths.

Then, Native warriors appear with arrows notched to their bows, wary and dangerous, but they become mesmerized by this bittersweet song.

Then, one of the warriors comes forward and angrily snatches the oboe away, snapping it in two.

A younger man comes forward and picks up the broken pieces of the oboe. He gives it back to the missionary, then speaks to his chief.

The chief signals for them all to go – including the missionary, whom they lead by hand into the forest.

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The next scene shows the missionary playing the oboe – now repaired,  
as Native villagers are gathered around him to listen;  
while children examine an icon of Mary & Baby Jesus –  
an image they can readily understand  
of the universal virtue of a mother's love for her child.

Last week, you had the opportunity to hear Dr. Margarita Romo  
preach the Good News of Jesus.

Margarita often says, "I love Jesus!"

and she has lived a life that bears evidence to that fact.

As you know, she received an honorary doctorate from St. Leo University  
and most recently, won the Florida Blue Cross/Blue Shield Sapphire Award –  
which includes a cash award of \$50,000.

She will use this money to keep two staff members on the payroll  
of Farmworkers Self Help, Inc.

This is characteristic of Margarita to give of herself –  
and this is a characteristic of a good mother...

Sometimes I have referred to Margarita Romo as the 'Mother Teresa' of Dade City.  
Though Mother Teresa was internationally known for her charitable work,  
both are examples of women in particular who made themselves  
available to serve God and the greater good.

Mother Teresa started her career in ministry as a Croatian nun  
having grown up in what was once Yugoslavia.

She entered the mission field, going to Calcutta, India,  
but it wasn't until she was in her 40s, with some rudimentary training  
in first aid, and 9 rupees in her pocket,  
that she dared to enter the slums of Calcutta.

The ministry for which she became world famous, though,  
began when she found a dying man in the street,  
and tried to get a hospital to take him in and care for him.

After she was turned away at several hospitals, Mother Teresa finally  
refused to leave, and got the care she demanded for that man.

She is remembered for the sentiment of treating every person standing before her  
as if they were Christ in a 'distressing disguise'.

There have been others – like these women, who don't just go around doing good,  
but are able to focus and take a stand to bring about something good  
despite monolithic indifference and outright opposition.

I met another such woman last week at the FL Conference of the UCC  
Spring Meeting held at Coral Gables United Church of Christ in Miami...

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The night before the meeting, there was a reception, and I happened to sit down next to a diminutive African-American lady named Enid sitting all by herself. We got to talking and she told me she was also from one of the UCC churches in the Miami area.

Then she began to tell me about her efforts to preserve historical sites in Miami – specifically those relating to the heritage of African-Americans.

Enid told me about the Hampton House which was owned by Jewish people, but catered exclusively to black people.

Even though it opened in the mid-1950s, it was still the Jim Crow era here in Florida, when black people were not welcome just anywhere.

In our “Sacred Conversation on Race” class a couple months ago this year, we learned about the “Green Book” which was a hospitality guide for black people traveling throughout the South.

The Hampton would have been in that guide as a safe place – even for such celebrities as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mohammed Ali, Lena Horne and Cab Calloway.

With desegregation, however, the Hampton fell on hard times and by 1972, it had become a place of disrepair and ill repute.

In 2001, it was condemned to be demolished.

However, Enid Pinkney went into action.

As it turns out she is *Dr. Enid Pinkney* who worked for three decades in the Miami public school system as a guidance counselor and retired as the Assistant Principal for a South Miami Middle School.

She grew up in Miami and went to the schools there, got her undergraduate degree from Talladega College in Alabama and later an honorary doctorate from St. Thomas University in Miami for her scholarly achievements,

writing about the community in which she grew up.

She has been involved with an historical preservation trust since the 1980s before retiring in 1991 – so she was ready to serve.

She succeeded in stopping the demolition and getting the county to acquire the property, though it has yet to be restored.

Still it has been a success and one of her allies was a white man who told her that his father used to go to the Hampton where the visiting entertainers put on a show even better than the entertainment they did at the big hotels downtown.

[http://www.preservationnation.org/who-we-are/press-center/press-releases/2012/enid-pinkney.html#.VUu\\_ZfViko](http://www.preservationnation.org/who-we-are/press-center/press-releases/2012/enid-pinkney.html#.VUu_ZfViko)

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Another project that Dr. Pinkney has taken on was the preservation of an African-American cemetery – the Lemon City Cemetery, which was on property designated for development. She and her group succeeded in stopping that development – though a portion of that land was permitted to be used. The bones of those who had been disinterred had not been reburied for many years, being stored in the meantime at an anthropologist’s facility.

As it turned out, there was a personal connection for Enid in this situation that she learned about after the fact, and that was that she had a relative buried there, too...

Enid Pinkney demonstrates the kind of ‘mother’s love’ that goes beyond blood ties in caring about community, seeking justice especially for the little ones in our midst.

*Well, I like history... and it brings history to life  
when you are preserving it so that younger people can see  
what went on in the past and what it was like...  
to educate people, to teach people to respect themselves and  
to respect their history.*

*I think that is so important that you do whatever it takes to pass that spirit on  
to the next generation.*

<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00016042/00001>

It is tricky to talk about ideals like a ‘mother’s love’ as absolutes, because not every mother is automatically a good mother. Yet not every woman has to have a child to be a “good mother” – or man to be a “good father”, and help the children of this world to grow up.

But the love of a mother for her child is there for us all, just the same – was put there in our biology and psychology by God, just the same, for us all to recognize and consider as an example to follow, and become a person who creates and nurtures instead of destroys.

According to the first letter of the Apostle John,  
*Whoever loves [the] parent loves the child born to the parent.*  
As we seek to love and serve God, we learn to recognize in the lives of people like Mother Teresa, Dr. Enid Pinkney, and Dr. Margarita Romo that they are children of God through Christ’s example and likewise parents themselves for those who will pass along the love of God to the next generation.

Amen

*Our lesson today from 1<sup>st</sup> John 5:1-6 is a reminder about  
Jesus' commandment to his disciples at the Last Supper to love one another...*

[5:1] Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born from God.  
Whoever loves someone who is a parent loves the child born to the parent.

[2] This is how we know that we love the children of God:  
when we love God and keep God's commandments.

[3] This is the love of God:  
we keep God's commandments. God's commandments are not difficult,  
[4] because everyone who is born from God defeats the world.  
And this is the victory that has defeated the world: our faith.

[5] Who defeats the world?  
Isn't it the one who believes that Jesus is God's Son?

[6] This is the one who came by water and blood:  
Jesus Christ. Not by water only but by water and blood.  
And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.  
*Let us be guided and challenged by these words.*

John 15:9-17

[9] As the [Abba/]Father has loved me,  
so have I loved you; abide in my love.

[10] If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love,  
just as I have kept my [Abba/]Father's commandments and abide in his love.

[11] These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you,  
and that your joy may be full.

[12] "This is my commandment,  
that you love one another as I have loved you.

[13] Greater love has no [one] than this,  
that [someone] lay down [their] life for [their] friends.  
[14] You are my friends if you do what I command you.

[15] No longer do I call you servants,  
for the servant does not know what [their] master is doing;  
but I have called you friends,  
for all that I have heard from my [Abba/]Father I have made known to you.

[16] You did not choose me, but I chose you  
and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit  
and that your fruit should abide;  
so that whatever you ask the [Abba/]Father in my name,  
he may give it to you.

[17] This I command you, to love one another.