

KNOX FAMILY LETTER

May 8, 2020

HAPPY MOTHERS DAY!

Well here we again as another week has passed and we are still physically distancing and staying home as much as possible. Who would have thought that in January as we started this new year, we would be in this situation right now?

The last time we were able to worship together was March 15 and now we are into May and still are not able to worship together. There is part of me that gets upset when I see some stores and businesses continuing to operate but as Christians, we are not able to gather and to worship together. Yes, I get it that this virus is serious, and we need to be very careful. I also understand that there are essential services that need to remain open. But, isn't worshipping God together an essential service for us as Christians? I'm hoping that soon we will get the green light to gather together even if we have to sit in different corners of the church, or in our cars again or even on a bright sunny day bring our picnic chairs and sit at a distance in our parking lot!!!! That would be different.

But until then, I hope that you are at least worshipping and praying by reading the sermon that I have been preparing for you and maybe catching a worship service on TV or online. I actually have been watching worship services from different areas of this country. One service that I particularly enjoy is called the Church of the Rock. It comes from Winnipeg Manitoba. The minister is kind of "way out there" sometimes and can be pretty funny but he is true to the Word.

I am so looking forward to seeing all of you again. Even if we can't hug or shake hands, we can always wave to each other! I am continuing to pray for all of you and I hope that you are staying safe. I am here if you need anything or just to talk.

Take care and God bless you!

Barb

THE MEANEST MOTHER IN THE WORLD

I would like to start our time together today by including this story called, "The Meanest Mother in the World" and it was written by a young mother in 1967 . It goes like this:

I had the meanest mother in the whole world. While other kids ate candy for breakfast, I had to have cereal, eggs or toast. When others had cokes and candy for lunch, I had to eat a sandwich. As you can guess, my supper was different than the other kids' also. But at least, I wasn't alone in my sufferings. My sister and two brothers had the same mean mother as I did.

We had to wear clean clothes and take a bath. The other kids always wore their clothes for days. We reached the height of insults because she made our clothes herself, just to save money. Why, oh why, did we have to have a mother who made us feel different from our friends? The worst is yet to come. We had to be in bed by nine each night and up at eight the next morning. We couldn't sleep till noon like our friends. So, while they slept-my mother actually had the nerve to break the child-labor law. She made us work. We had to wash dishes, make beds, learn to cook and all sorts of cruel things. I believe she laid awake at night thinking up mean things to do to us. She always insisted upon us telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, even if it killed us and it nearly did. By the time we were teen-agers, she was much wiser, and our life became even more unbearable.

None of this tooting the horn of a car for us to come running. She embarrassed us to no end by making our dates and friends come to the door to get us. If I spent the night with a girlfriend, can you imagine she checked on me to see if I was really there. I never had the chance to elope to Mexico. That is if I'd had a boyfriend to elope with. I forgot to mention, while my friends were dating at the mature age of 12 and 13, my old fashioned mother refused to let me date until the age of 15 and 16. Fifteen, that is, if you dated only to go to a school function. And that was maybe twice a year.

Through the years, things didn't improve a bit. We could not lie

in bed, "sick" like our friends did, and miss school. If our friends had a toe ache, a hang nail or serious ailment, they could stay home from school. Our marks in school had to be up to par. Our friends' report cards had beautiful colors on them, black for passing, red for failing. My mother being as different as she was, would settle for nothing less than ugly black marks. As the years rolled by, first one and then the other of us was put to shame. We graduated from high school. With our mother behind us, talking, hitting and demanding respect, none of us was allowed the pleasure of being a drop-out. My mother was a complete failure as a mother. Out of four children, a couple of us attained some higher education. None of us have ever been arrested, divorced or beaten his mate. Each of my brothers served his time in the service of this country. And whom do we have to blame for the terrible way we turned out? You're right, our mean mother. Look at the things we missed. We never got to march in a protest parade, nor to take part in a riot, burn draft cards, and a million and one other things that our friends did. She forced us to grow up into God-fearing, educated, honest adults. Using this as a background, I am trying to raise my three children. I stand a little taller and I am filled with pride when my children call me mean. Because, you see, I thank God, He gave me the meanest mother in the whole world.

SERMON: A NEW COMMAND I GIVE YOU

OPENING PRAYER

Thank You, Lord God, for the opportunity of worship, for the freedom to be amongst Your family. Even though we can't meet together physically, we feel the warmth of Your embrace Thank You that as we worship, we can put aside, the uncertainties of this world and rest upon the certainties of the Kingdom, for Your promises are not changeable but immovable and eternal. Thank You that we can bring to Your feet all the hurts and fears that trouble us, and leave them there, knowing that Your strength and assurance are all that we require. Thank you that as we draw near in worship, we are transported from a world of concerns and fears,

to a place where we can be at peace in Your presence, find healing, wholeness and refreshment. Thank You, Lord God, for the opportunity of worship. We pray too for the members of our family and of our human families around the world who are afflicted or suffering at this time. We pray for those who need healing, those who require bread or shelter, those who are preparing for their death, those who are grieving, and those who are preparing to welcome new life into the world. Hear our prayers for our brothers and sisters and all those who we raise before You in our hearts. Guide and give wisdom and the knowledge needed to all doctors and nurses, care-givers and anyone looking after the sick. Give them strength to carry on through this terrible pandemic.

We pray for our church family as we still are compelled to worship in our homes. Keep each member safe and well, so that soon we will be able to come together again and worship.

Be with us now as we pray the words You have given us: *Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen*

A READING FROM ACTS 11:1-18

The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So, when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them."

Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened: "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the air. Then I heard a voice telling me, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.' "I replied, 'Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.'

"The voice spoke from heaven a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.' This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.

"Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house. He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.'

"As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' So, if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?"

When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."

A READING FROM JOHN 13:31-35

When Judas was gone, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself and will glorify him at once.

"My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so, you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

SERMON: "A NEW COMMAND I GIVE YOU"

Loving God, as You opened the tomb and raised Jesus to new life, so open our hearts and minds by the power of Your Holy Spirit that as Your Word is proclaimed, we may hear with joy what You say to us today, and in confidence go forth to live what You show us. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Today we speak in the name of Christ Jesus about love; about Christ-like love; about the kind of love mothers and fathers and indeed each one of us are called to have and, by the grace of God, we do have if we are following in His steps through faith.

We know the commandments concerning love; about who we should love and how we should love.

Jesus is asked “What is the greatest commandment?”. And He replies: ***“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind, and the second is like it; love your neighbour as yourself”.***

Rabbi Label Lam, writing about the second of these laws, as it is found in Leviticus 19:18, tells a story that goes like this:

A Russian peasant farmer who never left the small and parochial surroundings of his town had occasion to come the big city of Moscow. He arrived at the elegant hotel with mud on his boots and overalls looking completely inappropriate. The man at the desk assigned him to a room on the top floor and treated him as any other paying customer.

With key in hand and a few possessions he started the long climb to the hotel room. On the first landing there was a full-length mirror. The man who had never seen himself before was suddenly startled and frightened by the imposing image before him. He growled and barked to scare the him away - only to find that the image in the mirror was willing to threaten and shout the same.

He ran to the next floor and confronted the fearsome giant again exchanging harsh looks and almost coming to blows. On the third floor they stood nose to nose and exchanged simultaneous insults as a deepening war-like attitude was taking root in both of the them.

Realizing that there was no where to escape this ugly beast-like fellow who was aggressively stalking him in the hotel he ran quickly back to the lobby and to the front desk to file a complaint. After having given a detailed description of the perpetrator the man at the desk understood that the he had met the enemy and it was the man in the mirror. So as to save the face of his guest and to disengage the hostility he offered simple advice.

He said, "The fellow who you confronted is here to protect people. He is really quite harmless. Trust me. If you will show him a harsh and angry countenance he will do the same. However, if when you see him you just smile pleasantly and continue on your way he will nod and smile at you as well. Enjoy the rest of your stay."

That's what he did and remarkably that's what happened.

King Solomon is reported to have once said:

"Like the reflection of a face in water so is the heart of one person to another."

To love another is a difficult thing, especially when our experience of love is flawed; especially when we are unaware of how much we are loved, and most especially when the reflection in the water is full of anger or bitterness or resentment.

To really love another we often need a standard or guide to follow and within that standard or guide we need help. Help to not only know what love is but to know that the love we need is within us; that it is embracing us and has the power to embrace others through us.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength and mind and love your neighbour as yourself.

Jesus added one commandment, and one commandment only, during the three years of his ministry. The commandment heard in our Gospel reading this morning is the one given by Jesus as Judas departs from the Last Supper to betray Him to his death.

***"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."
As I have loved you, so you must love another.***

And how is it that Jesus loves us?

Is it not by giving Himself away for us?

Is it by blessing us even when He knows that we are not following Him.

Look at the cross. Look at the table where the Lord's body and blood are lifted up so that we might remember.

This is the love that seeks to embrace us.

This is the love that is more than simply our guide and our model.

It is the love that, when received, is more than able to pour itself out upon others, no matter how we might "feel" about them.

It is the love of the One who gave Himself for us while we were yet enemies of God; the freely given love of the One whose faithfulness destroys our death and whose resurrection restores our life.

A story is told about a teacher who was helping one of her kindergarten students put his boots on.

He asked for help and she could see why. With her pulling and him pushing, the boots still didn't want to go on. When the second boot was on, she had worked up a sweat. She almost whimpered when the little boy said, "Teacher, they're on the wrong feet." She looked and sure enough, they were.

It wasn't any easier pulling the boots off then it was putting them

on. She managed to keep her cool as together they worked to get the boots back on; this time on the right feet. He then announced, "These aren't my boots." She bit her tongue rather than get right in his face and scream, "Why didn't you say so?" like she wanted to.

Once again, she struggled to help him pull the ill-fitting boots off. He then said, "They're my brother's boots. My Mom made me wear them."

She didn't know if she should laugh or cry. She mustered up the grace to wrestle the boots on his feet again. She said, "Now, where are your mittens?" He said, "I stuffed them in the toes of my boots!"

Ever have one of those days???

I think we all have had them at some point or other. The question is, will we bite our tongues and do that good thing we desire to do? Will we face the countless little crosses that appear before us each day? Will we willingly take on the burdens that should not be ours to take despite a lack of appreciation and understanding among those whom we are helping?

This is what love does. It accepts the little crosses, knowing that the large cross has already been taken for us; knowing that because Jesus has accepted us, so we can accept others in His love and that we can trust them into His care, His judgement, His mercy, and His righteousness.

It is showing love to those whom love is hardest to show; that stranger that we see in the mirror and the other strangers; those who are not in the mirror, but who stand before us in person screaming words like "crucify him" and holding in their hands the nails of execution.

Love one another as I have loved you.

This means be open to do that which was previously impossible for us to be open to do. To be open, as Peter, in today's reading from the Book of The Acts of The Apostles, was open. He was open in his imperfect human, but inspired way, to those he considered unacceptable; to those that all the apostles had previously

thought to be outside of the loving embrace of God. Peter was open to the gentiles and the foreigners; to those viewed by all as unclean, as unholy or undesirable. For us, that may mean be to be open to those that our wisdom and our feelings tell us to be unclean, unholy, unacceptable, and undesirable.

God will judge all people. Not us.

Blessed be God for that!

Blessed be the One whose love does not fail and who gives us that love. The God who vows to take care of all who follow Him, to nurture them and help them to grow and to usher them into the blessedness of His eternal kingdom.

God will judge all people. Not us.

Love one another as I have loved you!

God asks a question of His people through the prophet Isaiah, in the 49th Chapter of the Book of that Prophet. He asks this of His people who are in exile for their sins:

Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb?

And He answers:

Even these may forget. Yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me.

Christ has inscribed us on the palm of His hands. He does not forget us.

Love one another as I have loved you.

God loves us most powerfully and He gives us the power to love others.

Would you love someone today that you find it hard to love?

Then, know that God loves you; that God loves you without condition and will make your life full and abundant as you turn to love others with His love.

Let go and let God. Love one another as Christ loves you with a love that saves and redeems His people.

Amen.

Let us pray:

Most Holy and Eternal God, Your love is from everlasting to everlasting. We put our faith and our hope in You. You show us through Christ Jesus the love that saves and redeems all who would receive it and You call us to love one another with His love. May we indeed show to the world that we are Yours by being filled with that love.

We give thanks for the woman who gave us birth and for the families who have in the past, and who do now, sustain and support us in our living, those who like Christ Jesus love us no matter what.

We pray, compassionate God, for those whose mother has been a source of hurt and pain, for all those for whom one or more members of their family has caused them to suffer. May they find refuge in Your love. May their wounds be healed. May they find in You, in us and in others, the nurturing, sustaining love that is needed for their growth and well-being. Bless them so that in them, Your love will be made whole.

We give thanks to You, O God, for all those who, responding to the difficult lives of others, have stepped in to become surrogate mothers; for those who, in the absence of our own mothers, have provided the guidance and stability, the nurture and the love needed.

We remember single mothers and fathers around the world who struggle to be both parents to their children; to provide all the emotional, physical and spiritual needs without the constant support of a spouse. May they find the strength, the courage and the wisdom for their task.

We pray for those mothers who have been hurt, disillusioned, or disappointed in their role as mother. We pray for those who have been denied a chance at motherhood, and for those whose years of mothering have been cut short by the loss of a child. We pray for them and for those who have chosen to share the love you have given them in other ways.

Blessed be your most Holy Name, You, who are both Father and Mother of us; and blessed be Christ Jesus our brother, our Lord, and our Saviour every day.

Amen.

BENEDICTION

Go in peace, knowing that you are never alone; that the eternal God and the risen Christ are with you in the gentle touch of the Holy Spirit and in the whisper of the angels in the quiet depths of your hearts.

May the joy, the peace, and the love of all the saints above communicate itself to you as you live and follow in the way of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, both now and forevermore.

Amen

ANOTHER STORY

An elderly woman and her little grandson, whose face was sprinkled with bright freckles, spent the day at the zoo. Lots of children were waiting in line to get their cheeks painted by a local artist who was decorating them with tiger paws.

"You've got so many freckles, there's no place to paint!" a girl in the line said to the little fella. Embarrassed, the little boy dropped his head.

His grandmother knelt down next to him. "I love your freckles. When I was a little girl, I always wanted freckles," she said, while tracing her finger across the child's cheek. "Freckles are beautiful!"

The boy looked up, "Really?" "Of course," said the grandmother. "Why just name me one thing that's more beautiful than freckles." The little boy thought for a moment, peered intensely into his grandma's face, and softly whispered, "Wrinkles."

May all our friends and all those who would be our enemies if we let them be, have beautiful freckles and gorgeous wrinkles.