

**First Presbyterian Church  
Southampton, New York**  
*“Want to Change the World? Listen to Mom!”*

**2 Timothy 1:1 – 7  
Luke 2:41 – 52**

**Mother’s Day**

**May 10, 2015**

You know, there’s probably no person more responsible for my being in this pulpit this morning, preaching this sermon for you... than my dear 92 year old Mom, out in Goodyear, Arizona! So, you can either thank her for that, or *blame* her... as the case may be!

But, really, with all due and loving respect to my late father, it was my Mom who introduced me to the faith; who tirelessly, and without complaint, made sure I got to Sunday school and church every week, and Vacation Bible School in the summer; who tried to instill in me a sense of morality and ethics; and who encouraged me to be a regular reader of the Bible. Hey, she even made sure to bring along a peanut butter and jelly sandwich to every church potluck... because she knew I’d never eat a three bean salad, or a tuna casserole, or a broccoli quiche, or any of the other standard church dinner fare!

My Mom is certainly no theologian; nobody’s going to mistake her for a biblical scholar; and she’s listened to her share of televangelists over the years (for which I cut her some slack, since she really can’t get out and go to church anymore; and she still thinks I’m the best preacher in the world, too; so take that, Joel Osteen)... but in her simple, humble, dutiful way, she always did her best to keep me pointed in Christ’s direction; the direction of faith, and church, and discipleship.

Not that I always appreciated her efforts at the time! Oh, no! I mean, I’d chafe like heck under the burden of her, to *my* youthful eyes, overly chaste and Puritanical spiritual leadership. I’d suffer serious pangs of guilt when she’d give me a hug, kiss me on the head, and tell me that she just *knows* that *her boy* would never do the sinful things that all the other teenagers were doing! (Obviously, Mom never attended any of the parties at which I was playing the drums!) And I’d roll my eyes practically out of my head whenever she’d say that, just maybe I’d be a pastor of a church someday... “*Sure, Ma, whatever you say!*”

Nevertheless, despite my typical adolescent rebelliousness, my Mom just kept living a Christian life; and setting a Christian example; and expressing, in countless small ways, the Christian hope that we all have in our Lord Jesus Christ. So, to paraphrase that song from *The Sound of Music*, somewhere in my youth or childhood, my Mom must have done *something* right... because, here I am: a Christian disciple, the pastor of a church, a parent who’s tried to instill the same Christian values in his own children that his mother instilled in him.

Now, I’ve focused on my Mom this morning, because it’s Mother’s Day. But, obviously, it’s not only mothers who do the heavy lifting of guiding and nurturing a child into the Kingdom of God. Fathers can do it, too... although in my particular case, that’s not the way things worked out. (And, let me say as an aside that, later in his life, my Dad did become a more serious Christian,

and a regular Bible reader... and he even switched from Roman Catholicism to Presbyterianism, so he could join my church in Marietta, Ohio. All of this, not surprisingly, under the watchful eye of my Mom's spiritual influence!)

Grandparents can, and often do, fill that crucial role of spiritual mentor and guide to the faith; as do aunts, uncles, siblings, and family friends. I mean, *all* of us can no doubt point to someone in our lives who filled that role for us... the person who is responsible in large measure for our being here this morning. All of which is simply to emphasize the point that, our children... our grandchildren... all of the young people with whom we have some sort of significant relationship; they're all looking to us, whether they realize it or not, whether *we* always realize it or not, to somehow keep them moving on the road to a life of faith, and hope, and meaning. Just as we were looking to others, to do the same for us.

And we see this all-important truth beautifully emphasized in both of our Scripture lessons for this morning. First, in our gospel lesson from Luke, we're given a brief glimpse into the daily life of Jesus and His family. Now, there are some significant theological lessons in this passage, having to do with Jesus' growing self-awareness as the Son of God... and His having an uncanny sense of spiritual discernment even at a very young age. But I want to look for a moment at the more mundane, workaday, aspects of the story.

And the thing to notice in this regard, is the fact that Jesus' parents are taking the family to Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover... one of the most important religious celebrations of the year for Jewish people. And, not only were they in Jerusalem for the Passover, Luke tells us that "*every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover.*"

All Jews, no matter how far away from Jerusalem they may have lived, were expected to attend the Passover at least *once* in their life. But, only if you lived within fifteen miles of the holy city, were you expected to travel to the Passover celebration every year. Since it's about 80 miles from Nazareth to Jerusalem, Joseph and Mary wouldn't have necessarily been expected to make the trip annually. But Luke tells us that they did just that; which further tells us that Jesus' parents were especially devout in the practice of their faith... and that they included their children in their acts of devotion; like going to Jerusalem every year to celebrate the Passover.

Now, as I said, Luke included this story for theological reasons... not to tell us about the daily religious life of Mary and Joseph and their family. Nevertheless, the story still reminds us that Jesus' parents were actively involved in the spiritual upbringing of their children; and that's the point I want us to get from the story this morning. As Jesus and His siblings were growing up, Mary and Joseph were building for them a spiritual foundation, upon which they would then build their own lives as members of the Jewish faith community. Or, to put it another way, Jesus' parents were pretty much doing for Him, back in the first century... what my Mom was doing for me, back in the 1960's and '70's.

Then, turning to our lesson from Second Timothy, we find Paul the Apostle testifying to the parental and grand-parental nurture of young Timothy's faith... alluding to a process similar to that experienced by Jesus in His family, and by me in my own family. Paul writes:

*"I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother*

*Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands."*

Apparently, in the case of Timothy, his grandmother was a devout Christian disciple; who passed along her faith convictions to her daughter (Timothy's mother); who then passed the faith on to Timothy himself... much as Mary and Joseph passed the Jewish faith on to their young son, Jesus. And now Timothy himself is in a position where he can keep the spiritual ball rolling... handing on the gospel message of grace and salvation to those who come after him.

And so we see, once again, how the efforts at Christian nurture, by a parent and a grandparent, were crucial in the process of building a disciple... who, in his own way, and in his own time, would go on to help change the world in the name of Christ.

So, what does all of this have to do with us, here in Southampton, New York, on Mother's Day, 2015? Well, I think it has to do with us in a couple of important ways. First, it's a good reminder to the young people of our church and the surrounding community, that paying attention to the wise and godly counsel of the grownups in their lives... might just be a pretty smart thing for them to do.

Not that they don't already often do that... of course they do. We could cite many examples of young people listening to their parents, and their teachers, and their pastor, and other important adults in their lives... and gaining great wisdom and guidance by doing so. But, we also know from our own experience that, sometimes, the last thing our children want to do is listen to the counsel of their parents and other elders! This isn't exactly a news flash, I know... but it *is* something that we need to keep in mind as we consider the challenge of raising up children to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

As I said before, there were times when I just cringed at my Mom's super-square and uncool ways of making the faith a part of our daily family life. I mean, when she stood in my bedroom, smelling of Noxzema and scowling at the Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin posters that covered the walls... I would've given anything for a ticket on the next spaceship to Pluto! At times like that, I was convinced that there was nobody who knew less about anything... than my mother! Who knows, maybe Jesus felt the same way, too... as they were making that 80 mile walk down from Nazareth to Jerusalem. That's just a normal part of growing up, and I know you know what I'm talking about.

But, the point is, we need to keep reminding and encouraging the young people around us that, despite what they may think and feel... we really do have some wisdom worth listening to. They may not want to hear it, but if we consistently keep giving them the message... maybe when they're adults themselves, they'll see the wisdom that was there all along; like many of us have grown to appreciate the wisdom of our own parents and other mentors.

And second, it's also an important reminder to those of us who are older, whether we're moms or dads or grandparents or not, that we have a massively important responsibility to properly nurture the spiritual development of our young people. I know it's almost a cliché to say that "our kids are watching us," to see if the words we keep saying are backed up by the lives that we're living. I say it's a cliché... but we know that it's also the truth.

We have the ability to influence our kids greatly, for good or for ill, by the words we say; so, what we say, and how we say it, really does matter. But of far greater importance are the lives

that we actually put on display for our young people to see and evaluate, and to test against the things we keep saying.

We all know perfectly well that nobody, young or old, is going to pay one whit of attention to *anything* we say... if they can see with their own eyes that our own lifestyle hasn't been influenced by those words. We can make all the grand pronouncements we want; we can lay out all the great expectations we please; we can wax absolutely eloquent about the wonderful characteristics of a good and godly life. But, if those pronouncements, and expectations, and characteristics aren't part of *our* life... then even the youngest child will notice the hypocrisy. They'll sense the disconnect, between what we say, and what we do. And, from there it's just a very short step to the next youthful deduction, which is: "*Why on earth should I listen to them? When they won't even listen to themselves?*"

This, by the way, was one of the main reasons that Jesus was irritated with the scribes and Pharisees so often: the manifest hypocrisy between their flowery "going through the motions" of religion... and their calculated unwillingness to allow Almighty God to really have any access to their hearts. And it was also one of the prime motivating factors behind Jesus' turning over the tables of the moneychangers in the Jerusalem temple, shortly before His arrest and crucifixion. Those guys *talked* a great religious game; but their behavior was purely mercenary. So, Jesus told them to take the train, and get the heck out.

So, "putting our money where our mouth is," so to speak, and setting a good example for our young people... is one of the most important things that we can do as Christian disciples. So important, in fact, that we promise to do that very thing, every time we celebrate the sacrament of baptism.

Yet, we all know how difficult this challenge can be; and every last one of us has surely dropped the ball at one time or another... and allowed our lousy behavior to undermine the good words that we've been saying. Hey, my own kids got to be as sharp as jailhouse lawyers, in their ability to nail Sylvia and me every single time we failed to live up to some thing or other that we'd said. I'm sure you've gotten the same thing, too.

The point, however, isn't that we always be perfect in our efforts... because none of us is ever going to attain that lofty status. The key is that we just keep trying; just keep doing our best; just keep remembering that, like Lois and Eunice for Timothy... and like Mary and Joseph for Jesus... *we* have in *our* hands the opportunity to shape young hearts and minds for the kingdom of God. And who knows if one of those young hearts and minds might not just go out and change the world for Christ?

As mothers, as fathers, as grandparents or mentors or whatever we may be... let's give that challenge our very best shot. And we will serve our children well!

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen!