**Sermon Text for Mother’s Day May 12, 2013 by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema**

Proverbs 31:28-31, John 12:1-8

“Motherly Love”

What a great Sunday this is as we celebrate Mother’s Day. It’s interesting because for 9 of my 19 years of ministry I served in countries where Mother’s Day was not recognized. We love to honor our mothers, don’t we? Each of us thinks we had the best mom ever. We have such wonderful memories but doesn’t it seem like the news has been filled lately with mothers who have been exemplary. I’ll never forget the American mom who had enough of her adopted boy from Russia so sent him back on a plane by himself to fend for himself.

In order to be a mother you have to embrace the roles and the responsibilities that comes with taking care of someone. This is true of both biological mothers and those who are mothers simply by the fact that they are taking care of someone. You know, every mother’s day I feel like I’m walking a fine line of encouraging traditional roles and moving beyond that to what God expects and wants that might fly in the face of what society demands.

Our Scriptures have a little bit of both today. Proverbs, the entire chapter 31 actually, presents the most traditional of images for a mother and we embrace it. She goes to the market, she cares for her children, her husband calls her blessed. If you have time today and want to think about your mom, then go home and read Proverbs 31.

But John, admittedly, is much less of a mother’s day text, in fact many of you may think that it has nothing to do with mother’s day. Instead we find in this text a motherly love from someone who may not be a biological mother but treats Jesus with all the care and love that he deserved, just like a mother would.

So today women, this one is especially for you. I would guess that most of us grew up in traditional settings, and probably have even served in traditional motherly roles, and I praise the Lord for that every day. But many of you may not fill that and what we will find in John is the immense value there is in that if our focus is to service to our Savior. So today there is something for all of us.

**READ**

I was listening to NPR yesterday and there was a story on the 6 words that Jewish children used to describe their mothers. There were some classic ones: strong, independent, rethinker of tuna casserole: unconditional love but hates my outfit.

The depiction in Proverbs 31 is one of a traditional Jewish mother. It is an incredibly accurate portrayal of a woman whose primary concern is what? Her household. The world may be falling down around her but if her family is safe then all else is secondary. And she takes a primary role in ensuring their safety. A good friend of ours was a state legislator in Florida and he has a story of going back to his wife’s hometown and they were driving around when they saw a former boyfriend of hers from high school panhandling on the street. He said to her, good thing you didn’t marry him, and she said without missing a beat, if I had, he would have become President. The traditional behind every great man…

Proverbs tells us that this mother claimed and embraced her husband and her children as her own. That’s how a mother claims her children, that’s how she makes them her own. Not by giving birth to them but by claiming them as her own throughout their entire life. That American woman who sent that adopted son back never was a mom, couldn’t have been or that never would have been an option.

Some of the most motherly women I have ever met served in the church and they don’t have any biological children as their own. Yet as Sunday School teachers, as children’s choir directors, as VBS workers, they claimed each and every child as their own. We do that every time a baby is baptized in this church, we all become its mother and its father.

I can’t help but think of a 20th century woman who fulfilled that description of claiming every child who came across her path as her own and so was even given the title of mother even though she had no biological children. Mother Theresa who claimed every child, and each child in Calcutta saw her as their very own mom.

Proverbs speaks of a biological mother who fulfilled her role as mother completely because she claimed those under her care, her happy children, and her doting husband, as her own. But what actually drives her, and this is where we are able to make our transition to John 12, is what we find in 31:30b – “A woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.” Let’s look at another woman who feared the Lord.

Turn to John 12. We find a Mary who is mentioned. This is not Jesus’ mother. Mary is the most common name in the New Testament for a woman so it is easy to get her confused with someone else. This Mary is the sister of Martha and Lazarus. That we know for sure. Her hometown is Bethany, which is a beautiful name for a town but an even more beautiful name for a young girl. There is also a tradition that the father of Mary, and so also of Martha and Lazarus, is Simon the Leper because in Mark 14:3-9 there is a similar event as this Scripture that takes place at the home of Simon the leper. If that is the case then, get this now, according to John 6:71 Judas’ father was also Simon, maybe, some say probably, Simon the leper. It could be a bit of a stretch but it could also explain a few things.

We know this Mary from this story, but we also know of her from another story in Luke 10:38. This is probably the best known event in Scripture for this Mary. You remember the debate when Martha is working hard and is upset while Mary is just lounging at the feet of Jesus while he teaches. Jesus somewhat inexplicably to Martha characterizes Mary’s actions as the better of the two. From there we have a battle of the traditional vs. the non-traditional roles for women in Scripture. Martha who is slaving away in the kitchen and the first to greet Jesus at the death of her brother, and Mary who is more intent on Jesus himself and in protest lets Jesus come to her when her brother Lazarus dies. Two women, both role models, but two very different women.

Here in chapter 12 their two roles are very acutely present. Martha is once again doing what in vs. 2? Serving. Mary in vs. 3 takes a pound of costly perfume and anoints Jesus’ feet with it. A couple things we need to see here. The fact that Mary was able to have in her possession a perfume that is worth a year’s salary makes her an entrepreneur. Someone who fills a non-traditional role for a woman, especially in the 1st century. Very much along the lines of Lydia who was a business woman as well. She didn’t wait around for a man to tell her what to do.

Her call in this scene was to focus on her Savior and so fulfill the prophecy of preparing him for his death without even knowing the meaning of what she was doing. Every woman, as every man but today we are talking about women, has a calling from God and that calling is to be worked out in fear and trembling. I don’t want a single woman here in this sanctuary, and certainly no girl to think that there is one calling for men and another calling for women. Scripture simply does not portray this.

How can we read Scripture like this on mother’s day and every come to a conclusion like many churches do that there are only certain roles for women and those roles are, not matter how you say it, inferior to those of men. Mary already has entered this Scripture as a bit of an outsider, as unconventional because her ability to move outside of the conventional.

These verses are also seen in Matthew 26 and Mark 14 and in each of these times her focus is solely on Jesus, often annoying those present, like maybe her big brother Judas. But all she cared about was fulfilling this voice which told her to prepare Jesus by anointing him. Mom’s, how many hours have you spent in your life getting things ready for your kids or making sure they had what they needed for the day? From diapers to staying up all night while they’re sick, making their lunches, washing their clothes, bussing them to band or sporting events.

I know most of my mom’s life was devoted to getting things ready and prepared for her 4 boys. That’s why when the kids are gone it’s such a big transition for moms because just taking care of us: you know the husbands, isn’t really that gratifying. I get it, that’s okay.

But Jesus responds to Judas’ self-righteousness, and really profit minded objections to the wastefulness of Mary, by saying she did the right thing because her concern was primarily for him. Look at Deuteronomy 15:11. “Since there will never cease to be someone in need on the earth, I therefore command you: “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.” Jesus’ words were Judas, you should always be helping the poor, not just now when you are faced with a potential windfall of cash from the proceeds of the perfume that your sister was hiding. Leave her alone, she bought it herself for me.

To Jesus Mary was playing that motherly role and as a result, now this isn’t the incentive or the reason for why she did this, or why women should look to have motherly dispositions, but hey, if it helps, why not. We are told that if you as a woman have Proverbs 31:30b as your goal, memory verse, remember: A woman who fears the Lord is to be praised, if that is your status then Matthew 26:13 states: Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.

Mothers, your rewards may not come in this magnitude, but on behalf of sons and daughters everywhere: Thank you.