

## Sermon Text for May 8, 2016

*by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema*

Proverbs 31:10, 27-31, Matthew 23:37

### **“More than a woman”**

Today is a very special Sunday because it is mother’s day. It reminds me of that child who had to do a school project about the birth of babies and so he went to his mother and said mom, how were you born? Well, the mom did not want to get into all that, plus the child was a little too young to be asking about that, so she did what any good parent would do, she stalled. What do you mean? I mean, how were you born, and she answered, a stork brought me. How was I born? Also a stork, now go and play with your grandmother. So she went and she asked her grandmother, how were you born grandmother. Well, grandmother thought for a while and said: a stork brought me.

The child went back to her room and began writing her paper. My family has not had a normal child birth for three generations now. What we will do and what we will say to protect our children is sometimes more than what they want or even need. Our Scripture today is speaks to those who yearn to nurture, to care for, to protect, to love the children and those who surround them. We are going to see that the church more than any other group of people is called to be the epitome of a nurturing community. It must be what defines us.

In fact what we have been reading so far has been exactly that. The first century church was a church that loved those around them and trusted them implicitly, so much so that they had everything in common. Today we are called to do the same, to nurture and care for each other as a mother nurtures and cares for her own. This is what the church is called to do.

### **READ**

Jesus’ main desire while he was on this earth was to nurture those around to the point where they could be mature in their faith. He had no problems and no issues with spending time with people and demographic groups that many would have questioned. He insisted on nurturing the family of God, and that included children. Mother’s more

than any other group of people are given credit for being the most nurturing and therefore the most loved of all the groups of people.

In our churches over the last 30 years millions of youth have disappeared from our churches. Did you know that according to the Gallup poll 8 out of 10 kids leave the church before they get out of high school? And only 1 out of 10 kids have any sort of Christian education. It is enough to break a mother's heart. I know it broke Jesus' heart.

There has been a general loss throughout our country and especially in our churches of what I call the mothering mission, or the nurturing mission of the church. We all have our stories of how we were more or less nurtured in the churches we grew up in. The other day at Presbytery we were encouraged to write the names of the churches that had had an impact on our lives. I had 7 different churches and 4 different denominations.

What kind of nurturing did you receive growing up from the church? Well, in the Bronkema family we had to go to church whether we liked it or not. The older three Bronkema boys did it with a smile on their face and I went kicking and screaming. I remember being kicked out of Sunday School a few times, and not being the best influence in the youth group. For some kids, you just expect the worst from them, and when you do, well they usually surpass your worst expectations.

Do you realize that each of these children as they are growing up in the church will have 25,000 opportunities to connect with an adult who will show them the real authentic Gospel of the unconditional love of Jesus Christ which is found in unconditional acceptance, something we call grace.

But so often we feel as if in some way the kids have to earn it before we give it to them. If that happens then we set them up for rejection and it becomes fairly obvious that they aren't wanted. Think of the last time you knew you weren't wanted. When you walked into the room and the body language says it all. Kids feel that and when they do they want to get out of that room, out of that church as fast as they can.

This church's mission as we increased our youth director position to full time, as we look to reach out to families with young children has to continue to be a church that is a nurturing, mothering church in order to break the current trend that is happening around us. In this church a child must be able to walk in and see that it is filled with people who

have a nurturing motherly approach and want to gather the children under their wings as Jesus said that he wanted to do to his disciples on the day he headed into Jerusalem.

In so many churches the youth will latch onto a youth leader and feel the joy of being loved. That group will grow and bond together but when that leader leaves the youth leave to look for other places. The reason why is because the kids never make the association of that youth pastor to the church. That pastor was an anomaly, he actually liked me, knew me by name, stopped and talked with me. The church, well, it is still filled with the same old, cold people, and I still feel unwanted, but this person accepts. There is no connection between the two.

The reason is that the church doesn't always reflect that same loving, caring, unconditional attitude that the youth pastor reflected. It wasn't just his job to love the kids, it is all of our jobs. The church must be reflected through all of us and the only way that can happen is if every single person embraces every single child in a way that they know that they are loved. Kids, look around you, this is your church, this is your family, these are your mothers and your fathers. Church, this dear loving church, look in front of you, these are your children. Love them as a mother would love them, unconditionally, don't make them feel as if they have to earn it.

We just have a couple months before Brett leaves for Princeton. Session decided recently that he is of such value to the church that we don't want to lose him, so we decided to keep him on halftime and find another youth person who will be here during the week, while Brett covers the youth group times on Sunday.

You know the earliest church had to learn the hard way from Jesus. Remember what happened in Matthew 19:13-15. Jesus, the master is teaching on a hillside, mostly to adults and these young parents start making their way to the master to hear better and maybe to have their kids actually see him.

Well, the disciples see this happening and they cut off the young parents and their children. What do you think you're doing. Can't you tell that he is busy, with adults? He doesn't have time for you now. Jesus his voice cracking like a whip over the people says: What are you doing? Let the children come unto me it is not my will that even one should perish. We need to foster that attitude that not a single one of these kids will be lost.

I remember in a church growing up and we would have coffee hour. We would race over to the fellowship hall after the service so that we could be the first there, grab a fistful of cookies and then like squirrels go and hide somewhere with our stash so that nobody could bother us. One day an adult indignantly went up to the pastor and said, they are stealing our cookies, can't you do something. There was a collective snarl that gathered on the peoples faces when they saw us coming. The church can't live without the youth and children running around, taking cookies and coke and snacks from the well, dancing in the fellowship hall, eating the bread after communion, disrupting the normalcy of life so that they know that they are accepted.

Did you know that 95% of people who come to know Christ come to know him before they turn 20, and we are losing 20% of these. These kids' first experience of who Jesus is, is going to be interpreted through what you do and your love and acceptance of them.

Our goal as a church is that every single adult Christian who is active in this church will come to know that they have been called to give that unconditional love that they have known and felt to others, especially children. If you have felt the love of God in this place, you can't help but share it, you can't help but have it affect your life and the way that you approach and think about the children of this church.

On Thursday we participated in the National Day of Prayer. I sat at a table where there was only one person at it, I didn't know who he was, he introduced himself as Glenn Eberly. Then a guy named Sam Botta joined the table, he is the headmaster at Lancaster County Christian School. We talked, and apparently he went to college and played basketball with the guy who led me to Jesus Christ. You see, I felt the love of God through a youth pastor who never gave up on me. Still hasn't. He still prays for me, writes to me. He was imaging God in Christ for me. God made my youth pastor his friend. And that youth pastor made that boy named Bobby his friend for God's sake, and it was all about nurture.

Every single adult here can release the transforming power of God's friendship that they have experienced in Jesus Christ. Our kids are looking now in every dry well for that contagious community. Let's be that community to them, and to each other.

Amen.