

Sermon Text for May 12, 2024

By Rev. Robert Bronkema

Proverbs 31:25-31, Matthew 11:28-30
Carrying the yoke that the Lord gives us.

It is so great to be back with all of you. I spent some days in Nashville attending the Fellowship Community conference which is a gathering of about 300 or so more evangelical churches within our denomination. Stacy went with me this time, the first time in 30 years of ministry that we went to a preacher's conference together. The worship was amazing, the speakers were great, I would recommend Andrew Root to anyone. I learned a lot. Then this past week I went by myself to Little Rock, Arkansas, to a Presbyterian Camp and Conference Center to what is called a Credo conference.

They have three stages of those conferences and you have to be invited to them, early career pastors, mid-career pastors, and then I saved the best for last, late career pastors, as soon as you turn 55 you are eligible if you are invited. I was invited so I went. Brett Foote was there the week before at the early career pastor's conference. It was a very different experience, equally important, but different. I was shocked by the number of pastors who all they could do was complain about their church and the people in their church. We are family, I felt like the only one who loved his people and wanted to be with his people until Jesus comes back. It made me appreciate you all again and what a great gathering of people, what a great church you all are. Don't go changing.

We find ourselves in Mother's Day today. I need to say that my heart goes out to all the mothers today trying to raise children in this society and culture as we try to be in the world as disciples of Jesus Christ and yet not of the world. Because the natural inertia draws us to allow ourselves and our kids to get sucked into as much of the world as possible, so they don't miss anything. At the same time I am filled with gratitude for you who are raising children now as I am filled with gratitude for the mother who raised me.

In Nashville at the first conference I was made aware even more acutely by the pressures that mother's faced to keep up with the times, to be sure that we don't get left behind and so our children don't get left behind. Toilet paper commercial. There is real pressure within our families to control what comes next for our children. This pressure translates into anxiety as we worry about our future and especially the future of our children.

Today our Old Testament Scripture which we already read is the tail end of a classic Mother's Day Scripture that teaches us what life in Christ ought to be. But for many this is an

idyllic world which doesn't reflect the current reality. It almost seems as if from the moment our children are born we are jockeying for position to make sure that they excel and move forward if not at a faster rate at least at a comparable rate as their classmates. But this Scripture teaches us how to make our load lighter as we raise our children, how to not discard the importance of living in the world, but to recognize that while we live in this world and raise our children in this world our focus on Jesus even while we live in this world makes all the difference in our lives and in the lives of our children. Both of these Scriptures gives us an ability to make our load, our burdens, Jesus says our yoke lighter. Let's see how.

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There are so many attributes given to the mother in this first Scripture and then there is one that is of absolute importance that I want to lift up. Let's turn to Proverbs, we read that she has strength, dignity, wisdom, kindness, praised by her family. But the one that I want to focus on is the one that we find in vs.25, laughs at the time to come. It seems like today it is very difficult for any parent, but today I'm focusing on mother's to laugh at the days to come.

You know Stranger Things is a fairly recent tv series that many here have seen, you know why it was shot back in the 80's? It was shot back when I was growing up and in middle school. There is no way that it could have been set today because our kids are way to busy and way too programmed by culture and society. We never had a calendar that we had to stick to as kids. Back in the 80's we could spend hours, even days, in our basement and could have taken in a girl with supernatural powers who would live with us for weeks on end. That could happen because mom's didn't have to worry about making sure that we were on track to keep up with all of the other kids.

We had the ability back then to laugh at the days to come because time was not our enemy. The burden today of raising children is intensified by the cultural norms that says that every child has to find themselves and it is our job to help them find it. And when they find it, with our help by putting in events and activities and opportunities before them, then we support them in this which creates their identity at all costs.

Pastors and members of the church love to use sports as their scapegoat as to why church and culture have changed, I mean after all kids have practice and games on Sundays and parents choose Sundays to give their kids what they need in order to succeed. I don't blame sports, I don't blame anyone, in fact, I say it is our job as a church to be there where the people are, so if they are in the sports field or at Costco at Sunday, why are we in here complaining about it and not out there doing something about it.

Did you hear about that athlete in Harrisburg, he is a runner. He has set the state record for the 1600 and is about to smash the national record. He has the final state meet this Tuesday, in just two days. His mother has told the press, and he has agreed, that he will not be running in the race on Tuesday. You see, on Wednesday, he is going to be confirmed and his church has a grueling confirmation process and his mom says that he has to make sure on Tuesday that he is well rested and able to have a clear head on Wednesday. You've heard about this right? No, that's right you haven't because that would never happen.

Churches are trying to replace and force parents to reprioritize and when they don't then the pastors and the members shake their heads and wag their fingers at the faltering parents whose kids are involved in activities that take place on Sunday, and it isn't relegated to sports. Instead, why don't we do what our Kristin does, and our youth leaders do, go and support the youth during the week and on weekends when they are involved in these sports because this is what they remember when they are of age realizing they need a community to support them, a church to walk alongside of them in life.

It is our job to help mothers and parents, and all of us look at the future and be able to laugh because we know that as we go through life we know the end of the story, and that story ends with a victory for Jesus. When we are able to laugh at the future as a parent then we know that the voices of society and culture which constantly tell us that this is the most important thing for our child and if we get this wrong then they will never have a future, well, we have to laugh at this because God has their future in their hands and he is working to make all things good for them. He is their greatest cheerleader.

The challenge to the mother who laughs at the future is to not get so focused on the message of culture which is one of progress, that we see the miracle of our children right in front of us. Let me give you an example: escalator story. Progress is not a life full of activity. You know what happens when you cut the head off a chicken, it runs around and around, right? But it is lifeless. Activity and running around and around isn't the sign of life, it is a sign of activity. Life isn't activity and churches aren't just programs. Activity is not a sign of life which is good for us to remember as individuals and as a church. We are an active church, but our life has to come not from that activity but from the one who created us and gave us life in Jesus Christ.

Jesus speaks about the ability to live life in a way that under his yoke is easy and where you are able to find rest. Mom's when was the last time that you were able to say that you had found rest? When Jesus says come unto me he does not mean in the future once we die we will find this rest, but right here and now. When we are able to take on the yoke that Jesus gives us,

when we are able to live our lives under the balance that Jesus gives us, then this is what provides peace and the ability to laugh at the days to come which means that our anxiety is neutralized by our confidence in the future that Jesus holds for us and our children.

The relationship that Jesus wants with us which provides us with this life where we are able to deposit our heavy burdens is one of relationship, where know and trust and love Jesus. Deitrich Bonhoeffer who was the preeminent scholars and theologians of the early 20th century began his career as a pastor like most of us began our careers, as a youth pastor. One day he was called over to the house of one of his youth who was very upset and angry. It turns out the boy had just lost his dog, a beautiful German Shepherd. Bonhoeffer asked him to share some stories about the dog and it was like someone had pulled the plug on the bathwater and it all came storming out. He told story after story until he came to the end and he was visibly upset and asked Bonhoeffer “Is Mr. Wolf going to heaven.”

All of his training and all of his knowledge did not prepare him for this question and he knew that it was a question that the boy would remember the answer for the rest of his life, and he simply said that I do not know, but what I do know is that God does not lose anything that he loves, and I know that he loved Mr. Wolf very much, so yes, I think he will be in heaven. The boy reached over and just melted in his arms. He needed simply someone to remind him that he was not in charge, his parents were not in charge, he needed someone to remind him that the future, his future, Mr. Wolfe’s future was in the hands of God and so as a result it would be alright. Being able to laugh at the time to come is not easy, but it is necessary even in the face of the most tragic possible.

Our job as a church, our job as mothers, is yes to provide the space for people to hear and tell the stories of God at work, but also to find and provide rest for those who are in our midst, and that rest can only come when we know that the future is not ours to shape and fashion, but rather God’s. R.C. Sproul said I want to leave this place with my love emptied out. Jesus emptied himself on the cross out of love for us to provide us with the ending to our story, which is victory in him.

This child that we dedicated today is called to be the repository of generations of stories of the faith which is passed down from generation to generation. That is what we do here in church. If we do that well then it ought to remind us that we can rest while the world is frenetic and we will not get lost and be behind, but rather we will advance in that which God deems to be the most important thing.

This light yoke which Jesus encourages us to carry allows us also to pursue that which is really our passion, that which makes our heart sing and not what culture dictates or we think requires. So many of us are going through the motions as a wife, or as a Christian, or as worker, or as a person because we are terrified that we will be discovered by culture as one who isn't willing to go along with the wave that is taking everyone else along.

This mother's day, be secure in who you are and that is a daughter of God created in His image to be loved and to love, and to be able to laugh at the times to come because you have placed them in God's hands. Amen.