

**SERMON TITLE-** "Recognizing Mother"

**TEXT-** John 17:6-19

**PREACHED AT-** Neighbourhood Church

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We began this series of sermons with the story, "Are You My Mother?" It is the story of a search for an identity. The search begins with nothing more than a nagging sense that something very important was missing.

The young bird knew that it had a mother- even though it did not even know what its mother was supposed to look like.

For me this is a metaphor of the state of Christianity in our time. We know we belong somewhere but exactly where is that? Even worse, where do we begin looking? Fortunately we have a place to begin and that place is the Bible.

Today is Mother's Day and what could be better than to be addressing the question of who our "mother" is?

As Christians, we of course know the right answer to the question- our "mother" is Jesus. After all we are called "Christians" meaning "little Christs". But in some ways that begs the question just as it did for the little bird. Of course the bird has a bird mother- but without actually seeing what she looks like we aren't really very much ahead. We've all seen pictures of wrongly identified mothers- cats that have adopted chicken mothers etc.

Today we are going to look at one of the great "motherhood" texts of the NT. It comes from what has been called the great "High Priestly" prayer of Jesus- that He prayed for His followers at the very end of His time with them.

This term comes from the Jewish tradition of the High Priest and his annual sacrifice and blessing of the people of God.

A priest is a person who stands between the people and God and under the Old Covenant that was required. There was no direct connection available. The priest addressed God on behalf of the people and vice versa.

For the previous 3 years Jesus had been with the disciples- now He was about to leave them. For the past 3 years He had been training but still carefully walking beside them in each task and frankly for the most part actually doing everything for them. This phase was now over.

And so Jesus prays- He begins-

**After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come . . . I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. John 17:1-4**

Then He turns His attention to those whom He is interceding God about-

**I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. John 17:6**

**Inside Ourselves We Know Where We Belong**

Jesus, like the real mother of the little bird, has revealed God and Himself to His followers. This revelation is very important to understanding what we believe.

For Jesus the matter of recognizing where we belong was very important- even a core aspect of the gospel and He explained it in a way that anyone who has ever had animals [except cats] can understand.

**"The watchman opens the gate . . . and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. John 10:3-6**

The metaphor Jesus was using tells us a great deal about who we really are and does it in a way that we quickly recognize- even more in the animal world than we do in human society. Most of us are less familiar with sheep than we are with dogs- but the voice recognition mechanism is the same. [the famous story from the Iliad of Odysseus being recognized by his old hunting dog Argos, that he has not seen in 2 decades]

A dog recognizes his master's voice and responds instinctively. That response is built into the very way a dog's brain is structured.

Similarly, Jesus states, when we hear His voice, we instinctively respond to it.

This is something that I see all the time. When people hear the Gospel they know something is right about it. Even people who have never really heard the Gospel know that

things are not right and that there must be a different way of doing things. The idea that God wants to have a relationship with us- just seems right. And when Jesus is described as the Good Shepherd, very few people balk at that.

But there is an obvious problem here. While people respond instinctively to Jesus as the Good Shepherd the number of people who actually follow Him is not very high. In fact even as we look at our own lives we have to admit that our own track records are spotty at best.

So what's going on? If there is an instinctive response to the voice of our Master- why aren't we actually obeying the way we should?

Understanding this is as important as understanding the voice recognition wiring.

In fact the very same metaphor explains it as well.

We have a dog that knows my voice and my whistle. He recognizes my voices in a crowd and if I call his name, he immediately comes to attention.

But there are several things that interfere with this-

#### **The Voice Blockers-**

1. When he thinks I don't see him. Sometimes I can see him when he can't see me and I can watch as he responds to my call. He looks around to see where I am and then seems to decide. Now when I see that and do an extra whistle at a moment of indecision he will usually come home.
2. When more exciting options exist. For our dog the most exciting thing is a bunch of people going to the beach that he presumes will throw sticks into the water for him to fetch. This is a temptation he rarely overcomes.
3. When the signal is overwhelmed. This happens when crowds or traffic confuses the situation.

And far too often, rather than coming when I call him, my dog bolts and runs the opposite direction.

All three of these conditions exist in life and obviously none of them lead to a good end.

1. We think we can get away with a secret life
2. We see exciting options out there
3. We are overwhelmed by signals

So how do we keep them from winning and us acting like my dog when he doesn't listen to the voice of his master?

That is a big question but hopefully understanding what is behind that voice will motivate us to respond to that voice more quickly and more deeply. I suspect that there are times when my dog does know that his master is at time so frustrated with him that fate I am imagining for him is not fit for a family church.

#### **The Listening Aids- Understanding What Mothers Do**

As Jesus continues His prayer the various aspects of who the Master is come out.

**Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. John 17:7-9**

In these verses role the mother and priestly role collapse into one. In fact there never really were 2 roles but the priestly role can appear very institutional and remote at times.

When the priestly role is narrowly defined- as a mere conduit between God and people it certainly does not describe a motherly role. In Jesus' High Priestly prayer the true role of God's Priest/Mother comes out.

So who is behind that voice? It is not merely the voice of the priest dispassionately passing messages back and forth- it is now truly the voice of a mother. I think that if we understand what is behind that voice we will be far less inclined to bolt and run the opposite way.

#### **And What Do Mothers Do?**

First, even as priest, the Biblical priest was never intended to be a mere conduit. The role of the priest was much, much deeper than that. It begins with the matter of identification-

#### **#1. Mothers Identify With Their Children**

This role really came to life with the prophets who not only carried God's message to the people and the people's responses to God- the prophets intimately identified with the people they spoke for. When the people suffered the prophet suffered. When the people were punished the prophet felt the

punishment. Conversely when the people celebrated victories the prophets celebrated. The prophets identified with the people in profound ways.

Jesus has demonstrated this with His disciples for the past 3 years and what He is now summarizing it in His closing benediction. These are His children and He is making His request to His own Father using all the clout that He has- just like a human mother is inclined to do for her children.

His appeal is built on the fact that these are His children. He explicitly does not include all of humanity in this appeal. There are times when He does extend His love to the whole world but not in this case. All the children of the world deserve the love of a mother- but a mother has a mother's love only for her own children. This is Jesus stress at this point.

This is something that human mothers can understand. Their children are of even higher value than their own lives. The nature of motherhood is a love that lifts their offspring's importance above their own.

And so when that voice recognition software in your brain goes off and you hear His voice calling you- it is the voice of Someone who identifies with you from the deepest inner place. It's a voice we shouldn't run from or ignore.

## **#2. Mothers Intercede For Their Children**

Out of the place of identifying with their children, mothers do something else- they intercede. What does intercede mean? Is this just a Biblical word that we use in prayers?

It certainly can be but it is not supposed to be that- and when it is it misses the point. When we intercede for someone we put ourselves on the line for them.

There are many stories of mothers interceding for their children- often before the courts. In many cases the stories are heart wrenching. A son find himself in trouble with the law and a heart broken mother makes her plea for mercy.

Those judges who face such mothers are terribly torn, They seldom doubt the sincerity of the mother, I suspect, but as the mother's plea goes out, the judge must be looking back and forth between the child and the mother wondering whether or not it is any use giving the criminal latitude.

And I'm sure that the judge has seen far too many cases where leniency is not only wasted but is immoral on its own.

The human judge has very few resources to really know how to answer that question.

When we hear the voice of Jesus calling us- we are hearing the voice of Someone wanting to intercede on our behalf before the ultimate Judge. This is a Judge who can see things that no human judge can see. There will be no using the heartstrings that a mother's cry can elicit for insincere ends.

But for those of us who truly need intercession to the Judge- there is no better thing to do than go towards that voice that is calling our name.

**All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you.** Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. **None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.**  
**John 17:10-12**

## **#3. Mothers Protect Their Children**

There are times when human mothers protect their children from consequences that they should face. That is a fact of life. Those in authority such as teachers often dread the visit of a distressed mother. Their assumption is that this mother will completely miss the fact that their child has brought a significant portion of the grief they face on themselves.

But that aside there is also no question that a mother does indeed know what her children need. An observant mother knows when her child is sick and needs a little extra help. A mother knows when something is wrong that a doctor can't spot.

While those in authority may easily become cynical about a mother's overwhelming desire to protect and save her children- there is another side to the story- it is the side of the child that needs help and protection when it is not available from any other source.

And when it comes from this place, and when the "mother" is Jesus, who sees all- it comes not just from a place

of unconditional encouragement but rather from the place of the right balance between encouragement and second chances, and the discipline that is also administered by a wise mother.

And indeed a wise mother does discipline her children. The only thing about a perfect mother's discipline is- it does not come from a place of malice and anger.

So when you hear His voice- you can be assured that it comes from place that seeks to protect and keep you in the best possible place.

But there is one more thing-

**I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them . . . Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. John 17:13-24**

#### **#4. Mothers Want To Bring Joy To Their Children**

There is nothing that brings greater joy to a parent- than seeing their children joyful. There are times when we sit back and say- "Life is good." I don't know what gives you that feeling. For me it comes when I am out on the water on a beautiful evening. It is a wonderful place to be- and frankly we tend to try to create those moments- especially on holidays. That is after all what vacation ads try to sell. But those kinds of moments are fleeting- the simplest problem being bad weather.

There is a far deep place of "life is good" and that is when a deep peace and joy can fill our hearts. For a parent there is no greater joy than seeing their children gathered around and happy.

And how does a parent work towards this? By finding ways to bring their children, joy.

There are a lot of things that people have tried to extract from the Bible- promises of health and wealth specifically and in the NT there are just no such promises. But there are promises of great treasures and one of the most precious, in my opinion is the promise of joy. Here Jesus prays that His will have the "full measure of my joy within them."

That is an amazing promise. It first became very real to me more than 25 years ago while I was still building houses and as it happened, during a very deep recession. The world we

thought was secure was collapsing all around us and as it also happened we had been deeply influenced by the health and wealth teachers. We were definitely not becoming wealthy even though we tried every spiritual trick in the book.

So what was going on? And as I studied the Bible I realized that the real promise that God had for His people was not health or wealth- but joy.

Not only is the promise of joy available- but this is a gift we are to pursue. In fact the very value of the gift is that remains a promise even when the outward circumstances remain difficult.

That is a treasure that become meaningful then and has remained meaningful ever since. It is there when I am sitting on a boat on a beautiful evening and to make things even better- the fish are biting- and it is the gift when everything is going wrong.

And so when we hear the voice calling us- and we know what the voice is calling us towards- why would we bolt?