

Sermon for May 12, 2013 – Mother's Day

Luke 1:38

Theme: The Lord's Servant

- 1) Parents – this is who you are
- 2) Children – Honor them as such

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered.

Mothers – can you imagine what it would have been like for Mary - being entrusted with raising Jesus? All of a sudden you would go from average woman to having one of the most important jobs in all history: nurturing, educating and providing for God's son! What an incredible responsibility! What honor and trust!

Well mothers – you don't have to imagine what it would have been like for Mary. Why not? Because you also have been entrusted with raising up God's sons and daughters. No, none of you have given birth to Jesus, but every one of your baptized children is a child of God. When God the Father looks at your children, He sees his beloved son Jesus. And why does He see Jesus? Because the Scriptures say: *"For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."* (Galatians 3:27)

Yes, *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!* (1 John 3:1) This is what your children are! Just think, in a way you are all just like Mary. Fathers, you are all like Joseph. God has entrusted both of you – mothers and fathers – with a great honor and trust. Your children are not simply dolls that you dress up and mold to your fancy. They are sons and daughters of the Most High God. The LORD wants you to raise and nurture your children the same way He wanted Joseph and Mary to raise and nurture Jesus: to his glory and honor.

With Great honor comes great responsibility. So, parents, let me ask you: have you been faithful in raising your children as God would have you? When you think of your dreams for your children's future, do you desire the same thing their heavenly Father wants for them: that above all else they know His Word and stay faithful to His Son?

When I think about these things, I hang my head in shame. I don't often think about this responsibility to God and my children. My thoughts are often more earthly – aren't yours also? What kind of example have our children seen in us when they see us get angry or say things we shouldn't say? What kind of example are we setting for God's children with the priorities we set for ourselves and the time we spend with God in His Word? The fact is – we parents sin often in this regard and there's no denying it.

God knows our weakness. He knows our sin. In spite of it all, he chose us to be his servants to raise his children. Why? Is it because we are so special, so good? No, but because He is so gracious. The LORD has honored us with children, and with that honor He has promised us his help, presence and forgiveness as we fulfill the role He has given us. Parents are **the Lord's servants**. Let us see how this reality directs our parenting. Let us also learn to honor our parents as the Lord's special servants.

Part One: The Lord's Servant: Parents – this is who you are

Mary was a young, poor virgin. There was nothing special in and of herself that caused God to choose her to be the mother of our LORD. She was a sinner like all of us. Most importantly, she also was looking forward to him who would take away her sin.

But God, in his infinite wisdom and grace, chose Mary to be the mother of His dearly loved Son. The Bible says: "*She found favor with God.*" God loved Mary, just as he loves every mother here. How do I know God loves you? First and foremost because of Jesus. But also because the LORD has entrusted you with having children; children whom you would present to the LORD – just as Mary presented Jesus; children who belong to God by faith.

But what a responsibility! Who is equal to the task of raising and nurturing God's dearly loved sons and daughters? It is scary to think about it. Scariest still is thinking about all the times I failed to do the things the LORD wanted me to do. Lord, have mercy on me – a sinner.

And mercy is exactly what the LORD has on us. *God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law,⁵ to redeem those under law (Galatians 4:4-5). If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9).* In Christ we stand forgiven. Not only that, but God promises to send us His Holy Spirit to help us be the servants He called us to be.

The Angel promised Mary: "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.*" (Luke 1:35). Now it is certainly true that this promise is speaking primarily of how God would take on human flesh and blood in Mary's womb, but it also speaks of something else. Back in the days of the Exodus, God promised his people that He would overshadow them with his divine protection – that He would lead them – his people – to the land He promised them.

In Baptism the Holy Spirit has come upon us. As we look to Jesus in faith, the Most High overshadows us. He is with us, as He was with Mary, so that we can fulfill the great responsibility of nurturing God's dearly loved children. The LORD promises to be with us as we read His Word. He promises to protect us from harm. The LORD did this for Mary, and the LORD does this for us as well. He wants us to lead his children to know him. This is why our first desire for our children ought to be that they know the LORD – their heavenly Father – and their brother Jesus. And how can we do that? By having family devotions with our children at home, bringing them to Church and Sunday School, and by enrolling them in our Christian Day school in Algoma. We can lead by example. We can build their faith by showing our own.

And when we sin? The LORD reminds us through his law that we are merely His servants. Everything we have and are belong to him. And when we repent, He is there to forgive us and help us. He will not leave us alone, and will send his angels and the Holy Spirit himself – to be our aid and counsel. He loves us – not only because we are raising his children, but because, by faith, we also are his children!

Part Two: Children – Honor them as such

So far I have been addressing Christian parents. But now it is time to talk to children – both young and old.

Children: did you know that God ranks the sin of being disrespectful to parents as being as bad as murder? The Bible says: "*Cursed is the man who dishonors his father or his mother.*" (Deuteronomy 27:16) Listen to what God commanded the Israelites to do with a rebellious child: ¹⁸ *If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him,* ¹⁹ *his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town.* ²⁰ *They shall say to the elders, "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a*

profligate and a drunkard." ²¹ Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid. (Deuteronomy 21:18-21)

Now, let me ask you: Why do you think God commanded such a harsh penalty for those children who rebelled against their parents? It's because parents are the Lord's servants. They are God's representatives, who nurture and care for you in his place and under his command. The way you treat your parents is the way you treat God himself.

Now, children – both young and old – let me ask you: how do you treat your parents? Do you treat them with love and respect – seeing the hand of God working through them to provide for you? Do you speak well of them and keep their faults hidden from others? Do you listen to them and obey them? Do you, as they get older, support and care for them as they cared for you?

Here, again, we all have to admit that we are sinners. I have not always treated my mother and father with respect. Sometimes I have gotten angry and frustrated with my parents, when I should have been praying for them. Haven't you also? May the LORD have mercy on us sinners!

And the LORD has been merciful to us sinners. As we go to him in repentance, He forgives us. Jesus covers our unrighteousness with His righteousness. *As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. And why? Because: As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him. (Psalm 103:12-13)*

And how can we respond to such divine, fatherly love? We can respond by loving, honoring, serving and obeying our parents.

But what does it mean to honor our parents? Does this mean we should send our mother's flowers once a year and tell everyone how great she is? Is that honoring our parents? No, God means far more than this. We honor our parents when we first of all recognize God's divine hand and love at work in them – and praise Him for it. We honor our parents when we listen to them and – even when they are in the wrong – we take their words and actions in the kindest possible way. We honor our parents by praying for them, and serving them when they become old and infirm. We honor our parents by visiting with them and seek their expert advice, which has been built through a lifetime of experience.

Mothers and fathers: you are the LORD's special servants – chosen by God to raise and nurture his blood bought sons and daughters. Recognize this truth about yourself - rejoicing in the wonderful grace the LORD has shown you.

Children, your mothers and fathers are God's specially chosen servants. Remember them as such and do what the LORD commands you, when He said: ² *"Honor your father and mother"--which is the first commandment with a promise--* ³ *"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."* (Ephesians 6:2-3) God promises to be with you as you do this – forgiving and helping you along the way. Amen.