

The Federated Church of Hyannis

Sunday, May 9, 2021

Sermon: The Noble Character of a Virtuous Woman

Scripture: Proverbs 31:10-31

A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life. She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands. She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar. She gets up while it is still night; she provides food for her family and portions for her female servants. She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks. She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night. In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers. She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy.

When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet. She makes coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple. Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells them and supplies the merchants with sashes. She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come. She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: "Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all." Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Honor her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.

Introduction

Today is Mother's Day, which is a special day. Today's scripture gives recognition and appreciation for noble women and all the work that they do.

The Book of Proverbs was written by King Solomon, known for his wisdom. The book of Proverbs was written for his children to instruct them how to be wise. This is a book of wisdom to be handed down from generation to generation to equip the next generation for responsibility in leadership. Chapter 31 in Proverbs is advice Solomon gives to his sons on the type of partner they should look for in marriage.

Part 1: A Partner

Finding the right partner in life probably the most significant decision a person can make. Sometimes, if a suitable partner cannot be found, it is better to remain single than to marry. Paul in his letter to Corinth (1 Cor. 7:8) says it is better to remain single than to marry. But he also acknowledges that each person has their own gifts and remaining single might not be for all. It takes a lot of work to make a partnership possible.

A good partnership is one in which both partners mutually support one another and care for each other. Proverbs 31:10 says a wife of noble character is worth far more than rubies. Rubies at the time were the most precious stone on earth because they were extremely difficult to mine. It would have been worth more than a lifetime income. And Solomon says not a ruby, but rubies. That is plural.

And at the end of Proverbs 31:31 Solomon says “give her the rewards she has earned, and let her works be praised at the city gates”. In other words, give recognition to such a partner that embodies these noble characteristics.

Part 2: Mother’s Day

There are many origin stories to how Mother’s Day came to be a holiday. The movement in America started post-Civil War in the reconstruction period of America. Mothers from both the Union and the Confederacy began civic clubs to help work through the grief of losing children in the War. Anna Reeve Jarvis was one of the key organizers of this effort along with many other mothers. It was Anna Jarvis, the daughter of Anna Reeves Jarvis, who is credited for the campaign to make Mother’s Day an official National Holiday.

Like many traditions in America, it started with churches. Mother’s Day became a tradition in many churches that recognized the contributions of mothers to provide for their children and make the world a safer place to spare future children the horrors of war like the Civil War. Mother’s Day has been a tradition in the church before it became a national holiday.

The tradition of Mother’s Day also is part of the suffragist movement to recognize the contribution of women. When Anna Jarvis presented making Mother’s Day an official U.S. Holiday in 1914, she presented the case to Woodrow Wilson that the majority of holidays in the United States only recognized the accomplishments of men. Anna Jarvis never had children of her own. While the holiday is called

“Mother’s Day”, it is actually a day for the recognition of extraordinary women regardless of whether they have children or not.

Part 3: Post Civil War

There is something very significant about Mother’s Day and all the groups of women who joined efforts in the post-Civil War rebuilding of America. The nation was divided, the economy was destroyed, over 620,000 soldiers died in the war. Those of us living today will never understand how truly difficult the post-Civil War rebuilding and reconciliation was to reunite a broken nation. It was women, many mothers who were widows or who had lost children in the Civil War that rebuilt this nation.

In a couple weeks we will celebrate Memorial Day, which was Decoration Day when mothers of Union and Confederate troops gathered to decorate the graves of husbands and children lost in the Civil War. These women, many church women, held the nation together in the way a mother sacrifices to hold her family together.

I have been doing a lot of reading here at Federated Church about Sarah Dixon, the daughter of a Civil War veteran and first Pastor of this Church after it united as a Federated Church. She never married or had children, but she was an extraordinary woman of noble character like so many women of that time who gave everything to make the world a better place for future generations.

Today it is only right that we give thanks and recognition to such extraordinary women. Their worth is far more than rubies and their works should be praised in the city gates.

Part 4: Recognizing Good Work

I know the world is constantly shifting and changing. I don’t think the tradition of recognizing mothers on Mother’s Day is going away. As a matter of fact, I would say this year Mother’s Day is extremely significant. To all the mother’s who meet the challenges of remote school learning, protecting children from COVID, and working full time jobs; you fully deserve recognition for the efforts made in fighting a global pandemic.

Over two million women left the workforce during the pandemic to care for their families. The sacrifices made by so many women often are under-represented in comparison to the recognition that is so freely given to men. I don’t understand but

I do understand. I, like many fathers, don't fully understand the complexities of what you mothers do. I once heard a comedian say that the reason they say women and children first on a sinking ship is because us men would rather drown than take on the workload of you mothers. I don't understand the complexities of motherhood, but I do understand you deserve way more recognition than a card and some flowers once a year.

When I was deployed, everyone would write to me thanking me for the sacrifice I was making for my country. And I would write back thanking them, but I would also say the sacrifice my wife was making was equally if not greater than me being deployed. I was given a bed, meals, equipment, and was surrounded by great people all working together to support each other. My wife took on the role of being a single parent for six months. She didn't have any of the resources I had because we didn't live near a military base where all the support services are for military families. When my sons would cry at night, she was there to comfort them, and then go and cry in the other room. To all the military moms out there, every town should have a statue dedicated to you. But when it comes to dedicating statues or establishing memorials, you are often the ones who bear the grief and do the work to make it happen. I want to give a special recognition to all the military moms, both mothers of service members and mothers to children of service members. Because of the extraordinary work of military moms from the Civil War, we now have a National Holiday to recognize all mothers.

Conclusion

Proverbs 31 is a special passage of scripture that recognizes the noble character of a virtuous woman. She speaks wisdom, works long and hard often rising early in the morning, cares for others, manages budgets, offers charity when needed, provides for her children to ensure they are clothed and fed, plants seed for the future, and reveres the Lord.

God may have created Adam first, but creation never would have stood a chance of being completed without Eve. Happy Mother's Day to all the wonderful women of the world.