

More Than A Mother

Luke 8:1-3

May 14, 2017

Good morning Sisters & Brothers!

Today is Mother's Day. So I thought I'd begin by telling you a story, a story that I've heard many times over the years, about a mother who was large with child, her second. Her first was a relatively easy birth, coming into the world at a mere six pounds. It is not quite 13 months later, and she's rushed to the hospital to deliver another boy, into this growing family that would eventually number three boys and three girls. This one, so the story goes, was in a particular hurry to escape the confines of his small, cramped one room apartment. He was also quite a bit larger than his barely one-year-old brother. And so he came, very quickly. Sounds rather unremarkable except for the rest of the story: Every year on Mother's Day, and decade after decade, this son would hear something embarrassing and humbling like this: "You came so quick, and at nearly 10 pounds, it took the doctors longer to put your mom back together than it took for you to be born." But it was quickly followed by, "but you were the cutest baby."

Perhaps you have put two and two together at this point, but if not, that was my mom's story and I was that baby. Though my mom has since passed away, I can still hear that story being told; and I am humbled and so tremendously grateful for all you moms. For all you've done and continue to do, Happy Mother's Day & God bless you all! This day has been set aside to honor mothers as an official holiday since 1914. But today I want to make sure I am connecting with all you ladies, whether you are 3 or 103 years young. The question for us to consider this morning is one I would love to sit down with my mom and discuss. For my mom, family was everything. It defined who she was. I'd say, "That's great mom; noble, necessary and so needed. But what gets you through the day to day grind? What helps you deal with the tough stuff that comes along in life? What keeps you grounded? Mom, what really defines who you are?" Because mom, because ladies, you are so much more than a mother! That's the question I want us to consider today. What defines you? What really defines who you and I are?

And since I'm focusing primarily on those in this room today that are so much easier on the eyes, I look around and wonder how others might define you. More importantly, how you might define yourselves. You all have some kind of defining list, don't you? Take me for example. I'm usually defined as the husband of Laura the piano player, the handbell player, the special ed teacher, the mother of Peder & Linnea, the Nannie of Rowan & Calla, daughter of Ann and Roger. I guess that's more my wife's list, isn't it! But you get the idea. Today on this Mother's Day, whether your list includes being a mom or not, I want to tell you that you are so much more than a mother. Don't get me wrong. Motherhood is a tremendous role and responsibility; but not all will share in it, nor is it the role that ultimately defines who you are.

So what, exactly, does defines you?

This morning I'd like all you ladies to go on a journey with me, a train ride if you will, to three different scriptural destinations. Our objective will be to look at three truths from God's Word to learn what ultimately defines who you are, or who you can be. Now before the train moves forward, let me invite all the men aboard as well. Even to those who may have lost track of time out on the lake this morning! I do not want to leave you behind, or have you think that you have no part in this journey. If I were leading a Father's

Day trip, the train would roll down the same tracks to the same destinations! We all need these reminders. So let's begin. All aboard the Scriptural Express. I do love trains!!

A. Women Are Created In God's Image

Our first destination involves a long, long trip. We are heading way back to the beginning, back to the first book in the Bible, the book of Genesis. Once we arrive and disembark to stretch the old legs, much like after a long sermon, we hear this:

"Then God said, "**Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness**, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

**So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.**

"God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was **very good**. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day."

The first of our three truths is this: you are created in the image of God. This is true for you, whether you believe in God or not. I call this one a universal truth. Let's take note of three quick observations about we just heard on this our first stop today:

1. You are created equally

My first observation should be the most obvious point, but it is sometimes easily overlooked. God created both genders equally and fully in His image. You are equally made, equally blessed, equally instructed and equally declared very good. What a glorious day this must have been and still is as God proclaims it in His Word. Ladies, you are a wonderfully equal creation of God.

2. You are created uniquely

My second observation is this: you are uniquely created. No other part of God's new world was made in His image. Mankind is described here as the pinnacle of all creation. You are unique.

3. You are created intentionally

My final observation is how intentional God is in creating us. You are created intentionally. We see here a sense of resemblance to our maker. God decided to make you in His image—not an exterior resemblance, but an interior one. We reason, we create, we interact, we make choices, we are spiritual, and so on. God made you with characteristics like Himself. And notice that it was a unanimous vote to do so. Did you see that? The Godhead, the board of directors so to speak, was in total agreement. "Let us do this!"

\

As His intentional creation, God also gave us purpose. Look at the language used: “to rule, to fill, to subdue, to live and by implication - to work.” God created humankind with intentional purpose, giving all a sense of identity of who they are, and what they were to accomplish.

Before we get back on the train and head to our next destination, let’s briefly review our first truth. You are created in God’s image, equally, uniquely, and intentionally. It is one of your defining characteristics, ladies. It is part of who you are! It is vitally important to remember this truth. You are God’s special creation! You have great value and worth. Think about the song we sang earlier: “Lord, You are More Precious Than Silver.” What might that sound like coming from God who made us in His image?

Child, you are more precious than silver;
Child, you are more costly than gold;
Child, you are more beautiful than diamonds;
There’s no one that I love more than you.

Can you see yourself with such value and worth to your creator? You are created in His image.

Unfortunately it’s time to get back on the train. The conductor is calling, “All aboard!”

B. Women Are Coheirs In Christ.

As we rumble down the tracks we come to our second destination, Rome. We all get out and stretch our legs, and we quickly notice some writing on an overhead screen at the Coliseum. It’s from that old letter from the Apostle Paul, chapter 8:14-17. It’s a bit foggy in Rome today, so let me read it for you:

“For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”

Here we have come across our second truth. Paul is writing to all Christians in Rome and tells them, and tells us here as well, this truth: you are co-heirs with Christ. What a great and marvelous reminder!

But this truth is a little different than the first. Remember I told you the first was universal, true of everyone. This second one is a conditional truth. It isn’t true of everyone, but it can be.

1. Children of God

There are three important concepts Paul tells us in this passage. The **first** is, Christians are children of God. Before the cross the people of Israel were known as God’s special children. Now Paul puts us in that very same special category.

2. Adopted

The **second** concept Paul brings up is, you are adopted. Now from what I’ve read, the process of adoption was apparently unknown to the Jews, but it was common in the Greek and Roman worlds. It was a legal institution by which a person could adopt a child, *a person of any age really*, canceling all previous debts and relationships, defining the new individual wholly in term of his new relationship to his father, whose heir they thus became. Remember Paul is writing to all Christians, and he’s using legal language to explain how marvelous it is to become part of God’s family.

3. Heirs

This leads us to Paul's **third** concept, you are heirs. Here he introduces the idea of Christian hope. This hope is the "already but not yet" idea we have heard in the past from a former pastor we know and love. You have the rights and privileges of family membership now, but your full inheritance in heaven is yet to come.

By accepting God's free gift of salvation, you are coheirs in Christ. You are children of the king. You are royalty. You have security, peace, and hope, no matter what is going on in your life.

One of my favorite passages in scripture is Galatians 3:26-29:

"So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

What a wonderful passage on the great hope found in Christ! But notice too how Paul is also emphasizing spiritual equality. In Christ you are all one; there is no racial divide, no social hierarchy and no gender distinction. If you belong to Christ, you are heirs together according to the promise. Praise God for such a hope and such a defining characteristic available to all.

Do you hear that whistle? All aboard! It's time to head out to our final stop.

C. Women Are Coworkers In The Kingdom Of God.

Back on the train once again, we rumble down the tracks with some time to contemplate who we are as an individual created in God's image and what it means to be as a coheir with Christ. Soon though the conductor barks out, "Last stop--everyone out." Wouldn't you know it, we are right where our journey started: at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji. Doesn't it feel as though you never left your seat here at all!

Our journey actually started with that short, curious scripture passage we read before you even knew there was going to be such an adventure today. Do you recall it? Well there it is again. Amazing how they pop up out of nowhere. Let's review Luke 8:1-3.

"After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means."

Now some of you may be thinking, what's so special here? How in the world does this fit in? Great questions.

Here at your final stop, you are defined as coworkers in the kingdom of God. Luke more than any other Gospel writer tells us the stories of women. His gospel is unique with his focus on women. In this short but intriguing passage, Luke introduces us to Jesus' traveling companions. The Twelve disciples were there; but notice who else was in this traveling band: "some women," apparently many of them. This really is a revolutionary snapshot of Jesus' ministry. Many men of the day believed women were not even to be seen, much less heard. *One prayer of the Pharisees* even thanked God that he was not a pagan, a woman or unlearned.

For women to travel with this group would have been seen as scandalous. But Jesus shatters the societal conception of the inferiority of women, raising them to the status of

disciples (unheard of in Judaism), to a place of spiritual equality. Being with Jesus connotes discipleship. They are both companions and witnesses of Jesus' ministry. And as such, they are being prepared for involvement in ministry. In fact, they are already participating in Jesus' ministry as coworkers, by giving their financial support. Think about it: up until this point all the men disciples have been passive learners with Jesus, while the women, learners as well, also had an active financial part in helping the kingdom of God. Every time I read these verses I feel like saying, "you go, girls!" And thank you, Jesus, for turning your culture upside down and inside out.

I have three quick observations that coworkers in the kingdom of God should be doing on the basis of what's happening here in Jesus' ministry. First, coworkers are to serve together a common King. Remember that it's all about Jesus, not me. Second, coworkers stand together on common ground. We are all sinners, drawn in and rescued by our Lord. Finally, coworkers are to strive together for a common purpose. The body of Christ works together to give Him honor and glory.

Ladies, as God equally created you in His image, so too are you equal coworkers in the kingdom of God. What the women of this grace community do is really amazing. I really do admire all the ladies of this church do in their ministries. You ladies rock! In fact, you all tire me out, and make me consider what ways I might **better** serve as a coworker in God's kingdom. Thank you for your service. As coheirs in Jesus, it is everyone's privilege to serve in the kingdom. Wherever God has you, serve as His coworker each day. It needs to be one of your defining characteristics!

Conclusion

If my mom were still with us today, I'd first want to thank her for being my mom, but then I'd really want to say, with emphasis, "**Mom, you are so much more than a mother.**" Mom, it is God who ultimately defines you; giving you value and hope and purpose.

One of my wife's favorite quotes, from the book "Telling Yourself the Truth," says it well: "A Christian is not a person who is dominated by outside forces of the world, not one whose happiness or unhappiness depends upon situations, circumstances, or attending events. The Christian's happiness comes through his/her knowledge of Jesus and the power of God within."

--Backus and Chapian, *Telling Yourself the Truth*

To all my sisters in Christ, mom or daughters of moms: you are so beautiful and wonderfully made--so valuable. You are adopted into a royal family where hope never dies. It a sure hope we have as God's children, the "already but not yet." And you are gifted with a purpose: to serve your King and Lord.

Whether this Mother's Day, or any day, brings you great joy or great sadness, never forget that it is God who defines you, and that is enough.

To any of my potential sisters in Christ, would you consider joining God's family? At a bare minimum, please check it out. There's always room for you, and you can't beat the benefits. The King of kings and Lord of lords Himself invites you to come into his royal family.

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on May 14, 2017 by Scott Engelstad