

Faithfulness | Matthew 5:27-37

Today is Mother's Day. But as the video at the start of the service reminds us – every day is Mother's Day. As society tries to shut down the celebration of Mother's Day so we can blend and blur the roles God has given us, we intentionally stop and say "Happy Mother's Day!"

We honour all those women who have had the joy, privilege and challenge of bringing children into this world and raising them. We start by honouring our own mothers – living or departed – thanking God for the opportunity they gave us to live. I don't know about your mother, but my mom's job was not easy - I was her son! (HMD Mom!)

We honour mothers today, who choose life in a culture that does not always value life, who choose to trust that God will give a future for their children when it would be easy to be pessimistic and shy away from parenting as we see the evils in our world. Parenting is a real act of faith – always has been – as men and women believe despite the evil around that God is greater and He can and will protect and care for our children. We know that without God's help we are way over our heads as parents, but with the Heavenly Father to guide us, there is hope!

We honour mothers today as they mirror the love and commitment of God, sacrificing for the sake of their families. We honour mother's today, an essential piece to God's plan for family, the foundation of all healthy society.

And we honour those mothers who never gave birth but who have invested their lives in so many ways to bring help and hope to children who were not their own. God alone knows why some women are not able to bear children, despite their great love of family and babies. Nevertheless, God provides opportunity for these women to offer love and nurture, and we are so grateful for the investment they have made over the years.

I also want to remember the moms today who have had to do the hardest thing of all – say goodbye to their children because of death. There are some today, maybe some viewing this service, who mourn each Mother's Day the children they have lost. We include you in our embrace of love today.

So what gifts can we give our Mothers and all the women today?

I remember proudly making all kinds of crafts through the years for my mom – things that were displayed on the fridge or on the wall for the appropriate length of time before it could be recycled. I am sure mom must have had to hide a chuckle or a cringe with some of the treasures I presented her with. But we were children, and these were our best gifts for mom – even if she could not tell if the playdough animal was an elephant or a horse!

This morning I am feeling bad as I have a box of lovely fans for the Mothers in my office, provided by Evelyn and Daniel Loh. I would have had enough for all the moms and women who attended our services before COVID-19, but now I am not sure I have enough for every lady

who has joined us online today! That is not a bad thing... but sadly, I am not sure how I can get our gift to you. When we gather again – and we will – then we can hand these out. So please know we have not forgotten you and give our love to every mother, grandmother, great-grandmother- every woman who is joining us today.

And I have one more gift I want to share briefly before we move to the Table of our Lord in Holy Communion. It is the gift I saw in our text for today, our next portion from the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5-7. Today we are in Matthew 5:27-37. As I read it, you may be confused about how this could be a Mother's Day passage, but please bear with me. I believe God has a message for us this Mother's Day service.

- read text –

What if I said the best gift to give to Mother is not something we can wrap in pretty paper and tie up in a bow; neither is it something that can be put in a box or a gift bag. Yet it is more valuable than the most expensive diamond or the costliest clothes. Despite its great value it is available to each one of us today to give away if we so choose. We will need God's Spirit within us to be able to give away something so valuable, but it has no value at all if it is kept to ourselves.

And it is the one thing that will address all three of the topics in our passage today. Did you get what they were?

1. Lust
2. Divorce
3. Integrity

Now this present is best delivered by dad to mom... though children should early learn these lessons as well. So men, if you forgot the card, the flowers or the chocolates for mother's day, I have the perfect gift for you to give Mom. But children, listen to this first story and see how you too can give a great gift to mom today:

Khanittha "Mint" Phasaeng's life changed dramatically in 2015 when she was crowned as a Thai beauty queen. This opened doors for roles in movies, commercials and television. She was now rich and famous, but this is not what made her stand out to the world, and made her an internet superstar. No, what caught the attention of the world was a photo taken of her kneeling in honour at the feet of her mother- her mother the trash collector.

Yes, Mint's mother literally collects and sells trash for a living. So after Mint won the beauty pageant, she looked for her mother. She found her where she was every day all of Mints life, collecting garbage. Mint, still dressed in her pageant gown, wearing the tiara she had just won, knelt at the feet of her mother to show her honour.

And as Mint knelt at the feet of her trash collecting mother, someone snapped a photo. Without any shame, Mint honoured her mother and said her work was an honourable job that had saved her family from starvation.

One week before Mint's win, her mother was invisible to 99.99% of Thailand's population. But when she was cherished by her suddenly famous daughter, millions got to hear her story and learn of her character and worth.

And this, says Gary Thomas, author of a book simply entitled "Cherish,"¹ is the picture of what happens when we cherish someone. Mint didn't give her mother a card or flowers or money at that moment. She gave her something far more valuable. She showed the world that she cherished her mother as she knelt on that dirty road in her formal gown and tiara.

What better gift to give to your mother today than to let her know you cherish her. Proverbs 31:31 one says "Honour her for what her hands have done..." What does cherish mean? It means to value something very much. We go out of our way to show it off, protect it and honour it. We want others to see and recognize and affirm the value we see.

So what has this to do with our passage today?

The first section, verses 27-30 speak about adultery and lust, or looking at someone with bad intentions. Let me suggest to you that if dad really learned to cherish mom, husbands cherished their wives, there would not be a problem with adultery and divorce. If husbands showed the world that they cherished their wives, they would find their wives aren't going any place. And that works both ways: the husband who is cherished by his wife will not be looking for a new partner either.

In this passage Jesus hits on a terrible problem in his society, and one that has not gone away – but has only become worse. As media and the internet flash images of the perfect body with the perfect face in the perfect outfit with the perfect smile, people are fooled into thinking this is reality – and they keep looking for that person. They want that perfect person to be their spouse, and when they look over at the person they pledged to spend their lives with and do not see the magazine model, they are unhappy. And as Jesus points out, the eyes start to wander and look where they should not go. Jesus speaks of lust as the precursor to adultery, and as the poison that ruins the heart even before any act is committed. This is why pornography is such a terrible blight on society, as it spawns lust, which in turn starts to kill the relationship.

But when we cherish our partner, we admire them as they are and in our hearts say, "That is what beautiful looks like." Those who cherish their partner can be seen stealing glances, even staring at their spouse. They like what they see, not because they fit the world's definition of perfection, but because they have redefined what beauty looks like: it looks like their partner.

¹ Gary Thomas, *Cherish, the One Word That Changes Everything in Your Marriage* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids), 16.

That is why I can say honestly and unashamedly that my wife Lise is the most beautiful woman in the world. She complains if she gains a pound, or can't get to the hairdresser, or chews her nails to nothing, but none of that matters to me. She is my wife, whom I cherish, and she will always be the definition of beauty for me. And as we get older together she is just as beautiful as they day we married because I cherish her as my wife.

Jesus is very serious about honouring our marriage partners. If we start looking to someone other than our spouse for beauty and relationship, pluck your eye out! And if your hand touches another who is not your spouse, cut off the hand. Though Jesus was not literally telling us to do this, he was serious about how important it is to keep the family in tact.

Which leads to his discussion on divorce. In verses 31 and 32 Jesus notes that the law did give provision for divorce, which was often abused. So Jesus makes it a narrower gate to get through – the gate of adultery – before divorce can even be discussed. The question Jesus would ask any couple considering divorce would be, "Did you love each other?" And "Did you cherish each other?"

Many would say they love each other, but they could not say they cherished each other. They made a commitment to be together but they are not enjoying the journey. Is there a way to make the relationship alive and fun? Yes, by learning to cherish each other. Read the Song of Solomon and note how they cherish each other – and how much fun that is!

The greatest gift dad can give mom – and the family – today and every day is to cherish her. For those who are parenting alone, and you already know the pain of divorce, let me say I am sorry you had to go through that. It is painful, and now you are parenting alone. That is very difficult. If you had been cherished in the marriage, do you think you would likely still be married?

Then the third teaching of Jesus deals with oaths – or integrity. Jesus had seen it all too often where people made promises – and said things like, "I swear" or "you can take my word on it" and still they did not follow through. Jesus had seen all kinds of promises made, but very few carried through. It was like the children who made a promise but crossed their fingers, which meant they were not going to keep it.

Most marriage ceremonies contain words that go something like this: I promise to love and cherish you until death alone separates us." We make a promise to cherish each other, but that doesn't last very long in most relationships. But Jesus wants our yes to be yes and no, no. We are people of integrity if we are part of his family. You do not have to second guess our intentions or whether you will get taken advantage of. If we say we will help, we will be there, and we will do our best at whatever the task may be.

And our yes at the altar on the day of our marriage does not change. It is still yes when we are disagreeing, and when we are tired and grumpy – or our spouse is. It is still yes when finances are tight and our health is not good. If we are God's holy people – which we are by the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit within us – then we will find a way to cherish our spouse

even in the difficult times. As God's word says in Colossians 3:12-13, "As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another."

It is Mother's Day. Cherish your mother. Men, cherish your wives. It is the best gift you will ever give. Love is your commitment to your wife, and to cherish her is to let her know how important and valuable she is to you.

Even in the passage we just read from Colossians we see how God sets the example. We are "God's chosen people – dearly loved." God delights in his people who follow him, who are eager to obey and share their faith with others. God cherishes his people.

How do I know? Simple. I look to a cross and remember that Jesus died there in my place. I remember his great love for a sinner such as I, and when I responded to the call of the Holy Spirit to come home, and I took one step towards God by faith, I found he came running to embrace me and welcome me into the house. I know I do not deserve to be cherished by God – none of us do. But that is grace – receiving what we do not deserve as we put our faith in Jesus. And this is for every person listening today. God loves you: God cherishes you.

So now we prepare our hearts to come to the table of the Lord. With humble gratitude we come, a cherished people, invited to fellowship with Jesus at His table. Come...