

5.8.22 – Fourth Sunday of Eastertide & Mother's Day
“Blessed Nurturers”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Proverbs 31:25-31 (NIV) ~ Pam

- ²⁵ She is clothed with strength and dignity;
she can laugh at the days to come.
- ²⁶ She speaks with wisdom,
and faithful instruction is on her tongue.
- ²⁷ She watches over the affairs of her household
and does not eat the bread of idleness.
- ²⁸ Her children arise and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her:
- ²⁹ “Many women do noble things,
but you surpass them all.”
- ³⁰ Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting;
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.
- ³¹ Honor her for all that her hands have done,
and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.

L: These are Words of Recognition from God! C: Thanks be to God.

Acts 9:36-43 (NRSV) ~ Pam

Peter in Lydda and Joppa

³⁶ Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. ³⁷ At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. ³⁸ Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, “Please come to us without delay.” ³⁹ So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. ⁴⁰ Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, “Tabitha, get up.” Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. ⁴¹ He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. ⁴² This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. ⁴³ Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

L: These are Words of Healing from God! C: Thanks be to God.

Please pray with me:

Dear Lord, we thank you for our worship gathering this morning. Your words of recognition are soothing to the blessed nurturers in our midst, mothers, stepmothers, grandmothers, great-grandmothers, aunts, nurses, teachers, pastors, and all women among us. Let us hear these words of encouragement, realizing our holy tasks and skills to nurture and heal come from God. Give us compassion and strength for the journeys of caregiving and instruction. We thank you for the experience of love. Be present now as you speak through your messenger. **“Amen.”**

Happy Mother's Day! It is good to be in God's house to start this special day. It can be a difficult day for many women, who may have lost babies this year, or for women who cannot have children naturally, or for those in uncertain marriages, struggling over custody or divorce. It can be a tough day for us "motherless adult children" or anyone whose mother has died this year or before, even though we know they are with the Lord, the grief can bubble up to the surface. I cannot imagine the joy of motherhood today for those Ukrainian mothers and children who finally escaped the steel factory in Mariupol. I mention these other-than-Hallmark types of Mother's Day experiences to keep us aware, so our interactions are empathetic and compassionate to one another or to strangers we meet today.

There are churches today facing protests over the Supreme Court leak or choosing to advocate for nonbinary parents who can't relate to Mother's or Father's Day. We are not an activist congregation, so that is a different discussion, but we must be aware of our culture, pray for it, and not judge. The Mother's Day celebration we are having today can be traced back to the early 20th century in the United States. A woman named Anna Jarvis organized a memorial in the memory of her mother after she died in 1905. Three years later, Jarvis organized a memorial ceremony at St. Andrew's Methodist Church in Grafton, West Virginia to honor her mother and all mothers. Thus, the celebration of Mother's Day began to recognize their efforts and value in our lives--1908 and has until today! Mother's Day officially was named after President Woodrow Wilson's proclamation in 1914, declaring the second Sunday in the month

of May as a national holiday. All parents are worthy of praise, so we'll celebrate Father's Day in June!

Hebrew parents and teachers used short sayings, called proverbs, usually two lines, to share wisdom and discipline that made learning feel like a challenge or an adventure. This helped the young mind develop intellectually and morally. The chapter our verses come from is about the "noble wife," but moves into maternal qualities appropriate to the nurturing mother in all of us, both women and men (today, we recognize the women in these roles). The characteristics of such women are strength and dignity, shown by her clothing. Weaving and sewing were important skills of that day, and sadly are not taught as much today. This woman is not afraid to work; she watches over all household affairs, and when needed becomes a merchant to sell her goods to care for her family, like Dorcas in our Acts passage. That still applies today but was not as common in 1914. She knows, understands, and provides for the needs of her family, yet is also generous to the poor. She is loyal to her husband and children but is still a person in her own right and was a trusted and honored member of society, community, and her own home. That is very progressive for the 10th century before Christ!

Her children call her blessed and her husband praises her. But the most important quality is her Godly character. Physical assets of beauty and charm fade with age, but Godly character lasts a lifetime. That is what we honor today here at church: yes, you might be the best mother and nurturer of all time, but without God, you are nothing. Because of God's provision and her relationship with Him, this woman laughs at the future because she is secure spiritually, socially, and financially.

The second passage is about Peter's ministry and the church's early move to Antioch. Peter goes to Lydda, and while there, close by in Joppa (modern day Jaffa, a port of Jerusalem) a prominent and well-loved woman of Christ (a disciple named Dorcas) dies. In the Greek, her name means gazelle and she was one of those seamstresses Proverbs talks about; she was known for her beautiful clothing, sold it to her friends and neighbors, and gave much away to the poor. You may be wondering who Tabitha is; in Aramaic, Dorcas' name is Tabitha, so it makes sense that when they cannot awaken her, they send for Peter, only 12 miles away, to come, and he calls her Tabitha. It was a frantic scene of wailing in the house, so Peter sent everyone outside, so that he could pray for a miracle of healing. He did not touch her, but he kneeled in prayer and asked God for intercession. She woke up! Then he touched her and said, Tabitha, get up! Peter's reputation grew since he testified to two miracles (the man with a mat who stood up to walk and now Tabitha). Remember too, that earlier in Acts 9 we learn of Saul's conversion to Christ on the Damascus Road. Another miracle!

Many citizens were being converted in this town, and the big picture is that Christ was preparing his church for a new direction with new possibilities of relationship among the Gentiles. Jesus' previous and new followers were being shaped into Christ's likeness. The Lord was on the move! Remember our timeline – the disciples were spreading out; they had moved out of their hiding places and started to tell the good news of Jesus' resurrection to those who would listen. And miracles were occurring as Jesus had promised!

What a powerful example of God's love and nurturing character to care for someone's physical, mental, and spiritual being. This ties into Mother's Day for sure. Don't Mothers do that as do all caregivers--care for someone's health and wellbeing? Don't women in all those nurturing roles I mentioned in my opening prayer have the Godly characteristic of compassion? Tabitha was healed not because of her skill or standing in the community, but because she was a woman of God, who shared her talents generously with those who had nothing.

The nurturing role also extends to professions: caregiving, doctors, nurses, teachers, companions, mental health professionals, physical and occupational therapists, organizers, cleaning teams, and pastors, to name a few. We celebrate mothers today, but I also celebrate those of you with motherhood qualities of caring for others. That is what these two passages mean to me. Revisit them yourself to see what you think!

Could God be forming you or already has formed you to be his hands and feet in this world? We have numerous nurturing tools of our choosing: telephones, smart phones, Facetime, Facebook, Instagram, handwritten letters, cards, computers, email, visitation, food prep or delivery, and remember our prayer tools of intercession—all can be used to show we care. Check these two passages again sometime to see how you measure up. Then share the miracles you see in your life or another's to help spread the good news of the ultimate Blessed Nurturer, Jesus! This week, Jesus was present through Peter's healing hand. Will you be Jesus for your family, neighbor, friends, or perhaps a stranger this week? The reward is everlasting life! What a maternal legacy – more than just your genes and DNA! The Lord is still alive within you; thank you for

your virtues to nurture, and please know that our world needs you, more than ever! Be a blessed nurturer to someone today and take heart, your love is revealed in your work and volunteer service. **You are seen**. And through you, others will see Jesus! **Amen.** |//

Will you pray with me? Father God, we are grateful for your incarnate Son, Jesus, his life, death, resurrection, appearances, and intercession through others. We thank you for these Scriptures to show us how powerful and necessary you still are! Help others to see you as we go about our days; help us to find the strength and dignity to serve and nurture others in our midst. Help them to see you reflected in our lives and actions. Abide in us. **Amen.**