

The Rev. Dr. Cornel Barnett
 Redwoods Presbyterian Church
 Larkspur, California
 May 10, 2015

Psalm 98; 1 John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17
 "A Mother's Love"

Please take a moment to read the poem on the cover of the bulletin. Note that it is addressed to Poe's mother-in-law.

To My Mother

Because I feel that, in the Heavens above,
 The angels, whispering to one another,
 Can find, among their burning terms of love,
 None so devotional as that of "Mother,"
 Therefore by that dear name I long have called you—
 You who are more than mother unto me,
 And fill my heart of hearts, where Death installed you,
 In setting my Virginia's spirit free.
 My mother—my own mother, who died early,
 Was but the mother of myself; but you
 Are mother to the one I loved so dearly,
 And thus are dearer than the mother I knew
 by that infinity with which my wife
 Was dearer to my soul than its soul-life.

By Edgar Allan Poe, addressed to his mother-in-law

I love this poem for various reasons, one of which it diversifies the role of mother. Poe mentions his biological mother, his mother-in-law and his wife as mother or potential mother.

There are many kinds of mother: biological, step, surrogate, foster, in-law, single, adoptive, grand, great grand, great, great grand and godmother. Some single women are mothers to young relatives. All mothers are recognized today.

Paul says in the 1 John passage, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments."

Jesus boils commandments down to love. He says, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." The first expression of love for Jesus is to love as he loves us.

Paul adds a brilliant definition in 1 Corinthians 13: “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends...” (vs. 4-8a)

Jesus takes the commandment a step further. He adds, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” Jesus sets the example here as well. He gave his life for his friends and for the world.

I am sure my mother would have laid down her life for me. Suellen will probably do the same for her children. I’m not volunteering her! 😊

On Friday, I was at the dentist and the dental assistant told me about her three boys, 8, 10 and 11. I asked her if she would lay down her life for her children. She said unequivocally, “Yes.” I asked for a scenario where this would apply. She said if one of her boys was on a rail track and a train was hurtling towards him she would get him off the track even if it meant dying herself.

I believe that mothers have special “love your children DNA” in ways that men do not. It’s a theory. Suellen has told me more than often it’s because they bear the children and nurture them more intimately in the early years.

Nevertheless, the challenge comes to all, mothers, fathers and children. Everyone is addressed: People in Jesus’ day, disciples decades later when the the Gospel of John was written and people down the ages to us today. Jesus intends a world of love. Love others as I have loved you and be willing to die for your friends.

One of my best stories of my mother’s love was when I landed in hospital for six weeks and two days. Fortunately, the hospital was on the bus route from my Mom’s work to home. She visited me every day after work and weekends. My stepfather visited me twice. I was 10 years old and counting.

I experienced her love when she woke me at four in the morning to investigate an explosive fire in the docks a mile from where we lived. I was a budding reporter on trial at the local newspaper. I was too tired to go but she virtually pushed me out of the door. It was a scoop since I was the only reporter at the scene. It was the break that convinced the editors that I had what it took to make a good reporter. My Mom gave me that break.

My mother was there in many key moments, too numerous to recall and remember. I asked three members of the church to share with us what best exemplifies “a mother’s love” for them.

Faith McClellan

Anna Barnett
Carrie Kim

Rudyard Kipling's poem, "Mother O' Mine," exemplifies a mother's love. He writes:

If I were hanged on the highest hill,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine
I know whose love would follow me still,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!

If I were drowned in the deepest sea,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine
I know whose tears would come down to me,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!

If I were damned of body and soul,
I know whose prayers would make me whole,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!

God bless mothers and God bless the rest of us. Amen.