

Honor Your Mother – Isaiah 66:5-14

Introduction – Many of you are mothers and so Happy Mother's Day to you. Many of us are not mothers, but here is an undeniable truth – each one of us here has a mother who gave us life. This is reason enough - although for most, there are a myriad of other blessings you have received from and through your mother - to honor your mother; to honor her on a particular day, but also to honor her throughout your life and in the giving of that life to the world around you.

Honor Your Mother – The Word instructs us as children to honor our mothers in order that life would go well and long for us on this earth (Eph 6:14). Children, your mother is a God-given source of the fear of the Lord, of knowledge and wisdom, and you are to bind her law, her counsel, and her admonitions like a spiritual pacemaker on your heart and like precious jewels around your neck (Prov 1:7-8, 6:20-21). While these passages also speak of our fathers, there is something distinct about how we receive life and law/wisdom from our mothers. And this is true about our Mother, the church, as well. The Father of the New Humanity, the Lord Jesus Christ, brings forth life through His bride, our spiritual mother, the church. It is in the church that we receive the life of Jesus in Word and Sacrament. And it is in the nurturing ministry of the church that we “*grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ*” (Eph 4:15).

The Church, Our Mother? (Gal 4:26-27) – Individually, we are children of our heavenly Father; what we often miss is that we also have a heavenly or spiritual mother, and that is the New Jerusalem, the church. Paul quotes Isaiah where the prophecy is given in the language of a barren woman where God promises that many children will come. It will be as miraculous as a woman who is not even in labor bringing forth a baby. Of course, one could see Mary in her virginity in this passage, but even she is a type of what God is doing with this New Jerusalem, the bride of Jesus Christ, who is the mother of all in the New Covenant. In the chapters on the new creation (Isaiah 60-66) we also have this language of the New Jerusalem bringing forth children.

A New Family from a New Mother (Isaiah 66:5-14) – As Isaiah closes out his writing ministry, his prophecies remind his contemporary readers that those who are faithful and trembling at the Word of the Lord are but a remnant and scorned (v5). Even though there appears to be no hope of fruit, a voice resounds of God's vindication (v6) and before it seems even possible, this “barren woman” gives birth and this is an amazing thing (vv7-9). This is Jerusalem, for out of her downfall the New Jerusalem is brought forth and a new creation and a new people. The language of vv10-14 all center around a mother bringing forth life, rejoicing as she feeds and nourishes and comforts her children. In this passage we are reminded of why we should honor the church and why we should honor our earthly mothers as well. This is why Jesus would tell Nicodemus, representing old Israel, that he must be born again (John 3).

Reflections on Motherhood – Motherhood is not honored in today's society; parallel to this, the church is not honored in most of our modern evangelical culture. Motherhood is so, well, ordinary. A mother's womb is a very ordinary, physical, earthy thing. And yet it has been the very means God has used to fulfill His promise to reclaim and redeem His people.

Mothers: Givers of New Life – Immediately after the curse over all mankind in the first man, Adam names his wife Eve, “living,” “*because she was the mother of all living*” (Gen 3:20). Abel is murdered, but Eve brings forth Seth, the “appointed one,” through whom the promise would continue: the promise that the seed of the woman would crush the seed of the serpent (Gen 3:15, Rom 16:20). Abraham's barren wife, Sarah, brings forth Isaac, and his son, Jacob, renamed Israel, brings forth the twelve tribes, through the life-giving struggles of Rachael and Leah and their maidservants. Moses is given life and protected by no less than five mothers and brings forth Israel out of slavery. David's monarchy exists because his great-grandmother, Ruth, faithfully followed Naomi's God and dwelt in Bethlehem. The Gospel stories of Matthew and Luke do not begin with John and Jesus, but rather with the stories of their mothers, Elizabeth and Mary.

Abundance of Her Glory (Isaiah 66:11-13) – Returning to these pictures again, we see that a mother does far more than simply give physical life. She is the place of nurture and comfort, of abundance, protection, encouragement and understanding. She is the place of rest and peace, and so even the Gentiles flow to her, like abandoned neighbor-kids. So also, born-again Israel is the place of peace and rest, given by God to her, and the church is promised to become this kind of life-giving mother to the scorned, abused and abandoned world around her.

Faith for Mothers – For every imperfect mother out there, here is the gospel. Eve was imperfect (deceived by the serpent). Leah deceived Rachael; Naomi renamed herself Mara in her time of despair. Finally, the church has been a very imperfect mother to her children and to the world. But she is the bride of Christ and He has promised to sanctify her, “*that she should be holy and without blemish*” (Eph 5:27). Mothers in this covenant of grace need to believe that their children are the children of the promise as well, and live accordingly – that is by faith in the promises of God. The mother who believes God and the church which walks in this faith will join with Mary who, when hearing of the promised Savior in her womb said, “*Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word*” (Luke 1:38).