

The Rev. Dr. Christine Leigh-Taylor  
Easter 5A, May 10, 2020 & Mother's Day

Church of Our Saviour  
Placerville, CA

## **Mother Said**

Today is Mother's Day. A rather different sort of Mother's Day. It's kind of hard to acknowledge these periodic days of honor, when we can't physically gather to celebrate the people or the occasions that are named. Memorial Day is coming up – maybe things will be a *little* different by then.

My own mother, who departed this world 13 years ago, lived from 1916 to 2007. I consider that the world is changing very rapidly, but I am awed to think of the cultural changes *she* experienced over her lifetime.

While my mother was not perfect, she was absolutely the biggest influence on my life. Every time I tell a story about something from my early years it started with my mother. I owe my career choices, my college choices, and even how I met my husband to my mother and people she introduced me to. I hope you all have things for which you appreciate your mothers.

I'm glad she didn't have to live through Covid-19. She always believed medical science could solve everything her aging body threw her way. The notion of "palliative care" was an insult to her.

Despite every discomfort and uncertainty we are experiencing these days, it cannot compare to what the first Christians endured. They had to worship in small groups and often in secret because they were persecuted. Consider St. Stephen, who was stoned to death for preaching a provocative sermon. It was also long – perhaps another reason for the angry response. You can read the sermon for yourself in Acts Chapter 5. In it Stephen gives a synopsis of Israel's history from Abraham and his descendants, through Moses, and the building of the first temple. The theme Stephen pounded on throughout was all the ways the people rejected the prophets God sent them and defied the laws God gave them.

His audience was so incensed that they rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and stoned him. But in his death, there are reminders of Jesus' death, in that Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit, he saw the heavens opened, and he forgave his killers in his last breath.

Then the very next sentence in the account states this: "That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem..." Just a note about the tough times ahead for the early Church.

The passage from Peter's first letter appears to be a teaching to new converts. Peter employs several metaphors: newborn infants receiving spiritual

milk, becoming corner stones, a royal priesthood and God's own people. Each metaphor is worthy of a sermon. But not today.

The Gospel lection is very well known, but its context is less familiar. It is part of the five-chapter-long "farewell discourse" that Jesus gives his disciples at the Last Supper and before he leads them to prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, with his arrest and all that followed. These five chapters contain so much rich imagery –re-reading it will reward you.

The advice Jesus gives his disciples in this morning's lection combines commissions and promises. They, and we, the readers, do not yet realize that these are Jesus' final teachings. For example, what does it mean for Jesus to say that "in my Father's house there are many dwelling places"?

So, the first promise is that we have a nurturing, "abiding" – or dwelling – place with God. In the Gospel of John, abiding with God is not reserved to the future, but represents a living and current relationship with the divine. The commission is that those who abide with God are to go into the world and bring knowledge of God to others.

The second promise is that we already know the way to God. Although the Gospel states that "no one comes to the Father except through me," this exclusionary phrase might be directed at then-current sectarian disputes. I think the spirit of Jesus is that God's love and mercy is available to all.

The third promise is an especially challenging one. Jesus asserts that those who believe in him – "you" - will do not only the works that he does, but "greater works than these." The "you" is in the plural – Jesus is not singling out some of us as being more productive than others. On the contrary, Jesus claims that all of US will do greater works than he by believing in him.

That's a high bar for a commission. But it is what we proclaim through our Baptismal covenant, through the Lord's prayer, through our daily habits of forgiveness, charity and mercy. Jesus is claiming that taken all together the **actions** of people of faith – and I would include in that phrase "people of all faiths" – can create a more perfect version of God's good creation.

Just as my mother, and each of us who has lived more than a few years, has realized, our world is changing fast. And these days, we have a new fear to contend with concerning social contact. Instead of crucifixion, stoning or other gruesome methods, we can now die by contacting a deadly virus by getting too close to someone who is infected but doesn't know it yet because he or she has no symptoms. Maybe I'll have to wear a mask in public for the rest of my life. I think I can live with that, as long as I can socialize with friends and loved ones. Group travel, whether on cruise ships or on land tours will never be the

same. What will church be like when we can gather together again? Those Episcopal hugs will be off-limits. Prayerful bows will become the norm.

Our global world has become small again. We are all in this together. Let us commit to treating our fellow travelers on Spaceship Earth with the love, concern and healthy courtesy that will move us past current hardships into a more just and peaceful world.

I want to end with a few “momisms” that the Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner publishes each year for Mother’s Day. Scott is an Episcopal priest, therapist, and founder of the Living Compass Institute which provides annual Lenten and Advent reflection booklets. Here are a few choice thoughts many of us have heard from our mother-figures over the years.

“You don’t have to like it, but you do have to do it.”

“It’s not what happens to you that matters, but how you handle it.”

“Life is hard by the yard, but a cinch by the inch.”

“You will always have some dirt in your house, but you will not always have kids in the house.”

“When one door closes, one hundred open.”

“Always remember to be kind.”

“Take care of each other.”

Thank you, mothers! Amen.