

"We Are One"

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Let's open our hearts together in prayer. Let us pray: **Gracious and loving God, open our hearts to receive the Spirit of the risen Christ so that we may be one with you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

Today is a celebration of mothers: a celebration of the love mothers have for their children; a celebration of the love we have received from our mothers; and a celebration of the women among us – for we are blessed by the motherly love that you unselfishly lavish on all of us here at St. Bart's. Being a mother is a challenging calling of love and devotion.

A mother of three rambunctious kids was asked, "If you had it to do all over again would you have children?" "Yes," she said, "but not the same ones."

Someone once said that "the joy of motherhood is what a woman experiences when all her children have gone to bed."

Delmer Chilton, a Lutheran pastor and writer, tells the story of going to get eggs from his grandmother's chicken yard one evening and hearing a racket. "A sudden raising of dust, flurry of feathers and scattering of hens and chickens, much screeching and squawking, and then, just as suddenly, things calmed down and an old gray hen emerged from the bushes with a large black snake in her mouth." A mother hen risks her life to protect her chicks; it's a characteristic that we see over and over again in our loving and devoted mothers. Thank you, mothers.

In our gospel message this morning, 'the Jews' ask Jesus, "If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." To which Jesus explains, "I have told you, and you do not believe." Jesus' works, including his preaching and his miraculous signs, testify to his identity, but his demanding inquirers do not

believe because they do not belong to Jesus' flock, who Jesus knows, who hear Jesus' voice, and who follow Jesus. It seems that the faith of Jesus' followers allows them to understand who Jesus is, and to receive the gifts that Jesus offers: hope, peace, joy, love and most importantly, the gift of eternal life that no one can snatch away from them. With such awesome gifts, and Jesus' demonstrated divine power, how is it that his critical questioners don't believe? God loves each of them like a favourite child, and yet, they don't believe.

Erma Bombeck, a writer who achieved great popularity for her newspaper column about suburban home life, wrote an article about her favourite child. Erma writes, "Every mother has a favorite child. She cannot help it. She is only human. I have mine – the child for whom I feel a special closeness, with whom I share a love that no one else could possibly understand. My favorite child is the one who was too sick to eat ice cream at his birthday party ... who had measles at Christmas ... who wore leg braces to bed because he toed in ... who had a fever in the middle of the night, the asthma attack, the child in my arms at the emergency ward.

My favorite child spent Christmas alone away from the family, was stranded after the game with a gas tank on E, lost the money for his class ring.

My favorite child is the one who messed up the piano recital, misspelled *committee* in a spelling bee, ran the wrong way with the football, and had his bike stolen because he was careless.

My favorite child is the one I punished for lying, grounded for insensitivity to other people's feelings, and informed he was a royal pain to the entire family.

My favorite child slammed doors in frustration, cried when she didn't think I saw her, withdrew and said she could not talk to me.

My favorite child always needed a haircut, had hair that wouldn't curl, had no date for Saturday night, and a car that cost \$600 to fix. My favorite child was selfish, immature, bad-tempered and self-centered. He was vulnerable, lonely, unsure of what he was doing in the world – and quite wonderful.

All mothers have their favorite child. It is always the same one: the one who needs you at the moment. Who needs you for whatever reason – to cling to, to shout at, to hurt, to hug, to flatter, to reverse charges to, to unload on – but mostly just to be there.” Erma expresses the love of mothers wonderfully. Thank you, mothers.

Erma expresses how Jesus must have felt when in spite of him loving his sheep and miraculously demonstrating his love; they rebel and fail to follow him. Later, Jesus' Disciples experience the same problem.

Luke describes in Acts, Peter's awesome experience of God's love in resuscitating Tabitha after she had died. Tabitha is the only woman to be explicitly called a disciple in the New Testament. There were the original twelve, and over time, the number of disciples grew, women and men who followed Jesus and believed in him. Tabitha served those in need, especially widows who were destitute without the support of their husbands. Like Jesus raising Lazarus, Peter now raises Tabitha from death and the news spreads. But faith spreads slower.

Jesus had performed many miraculous signs and spoke frequently in the synagogues, but many did not believe that he could possibly be the Messiah. Jesus was in Jerusalem, during the Feast of Dedication, now commonly called *Hanukkah*, which is the Hebrew word for “dedication.” Hanukkah is an eight-day festival in December that commemorates and celebrates the victorious liberation of Jerusalem in 167 BC from the oppressive reign of the Syrian King Antiochus Epiphanes by Judas

Maccabeus and his brothers, and the re-dedication of the alter and cleansing of the Temple by the Maccabees. Hanukkah was, and still is, a major celebration of God's deliverance of Israel.

It was during Hanukkah that Jesus was asked the loaded question, "Are you the Messiah?" Jesus responds to his interrogators about his Messianic identity during this auspicious occasion and he uses the metaphor of the Good Shepherd and his sheep, a metaphor from the Hebrew Scriptures for the restored rule of God. It's all one consistent message with clear Messianic implications. But it also explains why they don't understand Jesus' identity. Jesus' sheep know his voice and they follow him. Following, hearing and doing, unite Jesus' flock of believers. They trust in him, they believe in him, they follow him, and they do God's work. In return, Jesus promises them eternal life – he has that power because, "the Father and I are one."

Jesus says that God and he are united in the work that they do; Jesus shares fully in God's work and power. In the verses that follow, Jesus explains that he is the Son of God. In a few weeks, at Pentecost, Jesus' followers will receive the Holy Spirit, uniting believers with the power of God and Jesus.

Similar to our Mother's Day that's set aside for the celebration of mothers, a king decided to set aside a special day to honour his greatest subject. When the big day arrived, there was a large gathering in the palace courtyard. Four finalists were brought forward, and from these four, the king would select the winner.

The first person presented was a wealthy philanthropist. The king was told that this person was highly deserving of the honour because of humanitarian efforts and giving to the poor.

The second person was a celebrated physician. The king was told that this doctor was highly deserving of the honour because of faithful and dedicated service to the sick for many years.

The third person was a distinguished judge. The king was told that the judge was worthy because of wise, fair, brilliant decisions in court.

The fourth person presented was an elderly woman. Everyone was quite surprised to see her there, because her manner was quite humble, as was her dress. She hardly looked the part of someone who would be honoured as the greatest subject in the kingdom. What chance could she possibly have, when compared to the other three, who had accomplished so much? Even so, there was something about her; the look of love in her face; the understanding in her eyes; and in her quiet confidence.

The king was intrigued and asked who she was. She answered, "you have met the philanthropist, the doctor, and the judge: I am their mother."

Our scripture readings today are about the life-giving power of God in Jesus Christ, foreshadowing the gift of the Holy Spirit that works in our lives today. They're readings about a gift that must be experienced; like the experience of sheep trusting and believing in their Good Shepherd; like the experience of a child trusting and believing in his or her mother; like the awesome experience of trusting and believing in God's love. It's hard to explain, but we can believe and experience the awesome power and love of God in loving relationship, and in particular, in the loving relationship with our mothers. Thanks be to God. Amen.