

Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

John 10:1-10

'Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.' Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'

WHAT MOMS AND JESUS HAVE IN COMMON

Happy Mother's Day! I'd like to recognize all the mothers here in church today. I won't bother recognizing everyone here who has a mother; that would be pointless as we all have, or have had mothers. I wouldn't be exaggerating if I said that "Mother" is the best job title one could ever ask for. Hands down it's the most important job in the world, and it's the hardest job in the world. The very choice of becoming a mother is a testimony of faith, faith in the future, faith in yourself, and faith that the joy of motherhood will far outweigh all the pain that inevitably comes in childbirth as well as all the headaches and heartaches that are sure to follow. I don't want to belittle fathers, and I know there are more than a few stay-at-home dads out there, but traditionally it's the word "mom" that shows up on more tattoos. Dad, you might enjoy throwing the baseball around with Junior, but when the ball hits Junior in the head, who does he go crying to? Teenage girls might think that their boyfriends are the best thing since sliced bread,

but when they have a fight, when their hearts are broken, who do you run to? Mom is the one who you can share your hurt with; and she's the one you trust to clean the wound and put on the Band Aid. She's the one who knows which medicine to give you and what to do when you have a fever, a runny nose, a headache, or most any ailment. She has by far the best shoulder to cry on.

And good mothers know that raising children is more than putting on Band Aids and comforting teenage girls. And it's a lot more than cooking and cleaning and doing laundry. You are actively, constantly, steering your children down the paths of righteousness. The psalmist may have been thinking about his mother when he wrote, "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." That's right, like sheep children need to nudged, sometimes yanked in the right direction. Mother's have very effective ways of directing their children. I don't know if it's genetics or if all mothers have some secret training class, but *where do they learn that icy stare?* You know the one that paralyzes you and makes you carefully consider what you will do or say next. Mothers attach serious consequences to a child's misbehavior. If you steal a bag of candy from the grocery store, your mother doesn't just go to the store and pay for the candy; your mother takes you there and asks the grocer to give him you some work to do to so you can pay for the candy *ten times over!* I've known mothers and fathers who tried to smooth things over for their child, to shield them from trouble, but this only postpones inevitable disaster. A good mother makes sure that a child suffers consequences for bad behavior, and of course a mother also *shares* in those consequences; she shares the sadness and frustration that the child feels, she commits extra time and energy to getting the child back on the right path because she loves the child and wants that child to grow up in a way that brings the child greater joy. In essence, she wants that child to have an abundant life.

So Mom is a lot like Jesus, who says, "I came that you may have life, and have it abundantly." Pastor David Lose¹, in a commentary on today's Gospel lesson, makes a very good point that too many Christians often diminish the point of Jesus' life and think about their salvation in a very negative way; by that he means that many Christians think that Jesus came to wipe away, or *negate*, our sin and thus save our souls from damnation. Forgiveness of sin is a wonderful thing, but if that was the only purpose of Jesus' coming and suffering and dying, we should all feel a little puzzled, wondering what has really changed in us or in the world. If I'm forgiven for sins past, present, and future, is there any reason for me to change? And if everyone in the world felt the same way, that our sins are forgiven, what is to prevent them

¹ "Abundant Life Now," by David Lose. Commentary on John 10:1-10 posted online at *Workingpreacher.org* (<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3198>).

from committing the same sins again and again? And if everyone just carries on the way they were carrying on, only now with the assurance of forgiveness because Christ died for us, then the world is not likely to change in a positive way; indeed the assurance of forgiveness for future sins could cause folks to sin all the more readily knowing that God will forgive them, and such a mindset could...well...make this world a very cold, cruel place.

No, we should not simply think of as the one who negates our sins while we continue to commit them in abundance, like a mother who continually pays the grocer for all the candy her children steal. That hardly helps the delinquent children. But we shouldn't think of Jesus as one who forces us to comply by a set of rules in order for us to qualify as sheep, any more than a mother requires a boy to take out the garbage in order qualify as her son. No, the relationship we have with Jesus is a given. Jesus says we will know him by his voice just as a child recognizes his mother's voice. And a child failing to heed a mother's call does not negate the fact the he is her son and she is his mother. The fact that we are God's beloved children does not change because we fail to obey him. From today's Gospel reading we can discern that Jesus' main aim is to protect his sheep from danger just as a mother's aim is to protect her children from danger, be it physical danger – like jumping into the deep end of a swimming pool before you know how to swim – or *spiritual* dangers – like become so obsessed with money and material that you fail to grow in your capacity to love others. Both types of danger, *physical and spiritual*, can lead us to injury or death, *physical and spiritual*.

And mothers, like Jesus, readily lay down their own lives for their children. Their overarching desire is the joy and well-being of their children, for the abundant life of their children. And what brings Mom the greatest joy in the world is what brings Jesus the greatest joy in the world; when all their children are living an abundant life, abundant in love and care for one another, and they can all come together and share a meal and enjoy one another's company – like the community that was described in the passage from the book of Acts – everyone caring for each other, and no one in need. Of course all people are children of God, so it's a great challenge for us to bring everyone into that community, but someday it will happen if we practice that kind of love ourselves and lead others to practice it. Someday we will all be eating dinner together at an all-you-can-eat banquet. So let us do our momma's proud, do Jesus proud, by living an abundant life.