

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: Various

"Why I Believe" (part 5)

A BLESSED MOTHER'S DAY!

I want to first recognize our moms today. Every time I preach on Mother's Day I have to say how appropriate it is that we honor our moms. It is fitting we do this as a nation and as a church. In fact, the honoring of mothers on a specific day began in a church over 100 years ago. That's why it is on a Sunday. And I might add, it usually is one of the most well-attended Sundays of the year.

GOD'S IDEA AND GIFT

Motherhood is not just a creation of God; it is a gift from God, a gift for both mother and child. There is no greater privilege, honor, or responsibility for a woman than to be a mom. God makes this clear in His Word. Eve was named Eve because she was the mother of all the living. God has given woman unique characteristics and gifts to bring children into the world, to nurture them, to feed them, to encourage them and support them. In short, a mom shows a child more than anyone in this world - unconditional love; and she does so in the most tangible ways from the very beginning. And whether you're a mother or not, all women have that capacity, the capacity to reflect motherhood in everyday life. In fact, I believe that all women are called to be spiritual mothers, to be able to impart the love of God into the lives of other women. To be spiritual mentors and to be spiritual examples. Just because you may not have children does not mean you can't be a spiritual mom.

You ask, "Fr. Ward, where does God say this?" He says it when Jesus says, ***"Go into all the world and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I commanded you..."*** We are to be part of birthing spiritual children for the Lord.

The Lord God first gave mankind the command to multiply, to procreate physically, to have a family whose foundation would be one father and one mother, and then to build a community of families. And so there is no greater role for men and women than to be fathers and mothers. And just as the devil slithered into the garden to break up the potential for godly families, he does so today, doesn't he?

Why is there a breakdown in our nation? You can trace it to two main areas - the breakdown of the family and the breakdown of the culture from its Judeo-Christian foundations. What happened with the sexual revolution of the 60's? Free love, which was really only free lust. And what was the byproduct of such thinking? Men abdicating their role as fathers and then traditional fatherhood being mocked by Hollywood in the 70's and 80's. For women, children are a burden so if you want to end your child's life in the womb, go ahead and do so. And being a mom actually holds you back; you need to be somebody; you need to go into the workforce and make a name for yourself. Now while there is nothing wrong with women in the workforce, in God's Kingdom that is not to be the first priority for women in general. The

first is to be moms and with their children as much as possible in their growing years. And for fathers, they are to be present as well but their role will be different.

God made both men and women in His image, but He also he made us different, with certain distinguishing features and gifts, that He then might bring us together and make us one to be the context for raising a family - the fundamental unit for all society. But what does the culture say? Men and women are interchangeable, and so it should not surprise us that we now have same-sex families, and not just celebrating but bending over backwards for folks who want to change their gender identity.

And then on top of building families, we are to build families of the Lord, we are to build the body of Christ, the Church. We are all called to be involved in Christ's Church. And this means being God's agents in bringing people to know the Lord. There is no greater role of a mom and dad than to raise their children in the knowledge and love of the Lord. God has no grandchildren. He only has children. That means just because our parents are Christian does not meant that we will be too. There must be follow-through. It's all about building relationships and building the Kingdom of God.

MOTHERHOOD SHOWS US A SPIRITUAL TRUTH

We have been doing a series this Easter Season on Why I Believe. We have looked at Creation, Truth, and last time, the Word of God. And I want to look at the third reason again this week. And it is appropriate to do so on Mother's Day. Some may wonder why. To find the answer, please turn with me now to **1 Peter 1:22-2**: *“Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, 23for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.” 24For,*

“ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS,

AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS.

THE GRASS WITHERS,

AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF,

25BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER.”

And this is the word which was preached to you.”

We go back to the Word of God. Recall from our last sermon, “the Word” is anything God does to reveal Himself, His purpose, and His plans. The Word ultimately is expressed in Jesus Christ; hence He is called the Living Word. The Word is God’s Message. It is the means through which faith is born – *“Faith comes from hearing and hearing through the Word of God.”* The seed that gives birth to salvation is the Word of God. But it is not enough to receive it and believe it. There is more. Let’s continue reading now in **1 Peter 2:1-3**: *“Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander,2like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, 3if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.”*

We are to long for the pure milk of the Word, like newborn babies. The Word of God is likened to mother's milk! We now know that there is nothing better for a baby for its growth, its immune system, and its mental development than mother's milk. It is considered a perfect food. There was a time back in the middle of the 20th century when science thought that formula milk was the way to go. One more example of man thinking he could do it better than God's way. But we now know that is not the case. While it is more convenient and requires less time, formula falls short. In fact, a number of health organizations — including the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Medical Association (AMA), and the World Health Organization (WHO) — recommend breastfeeding as the best choice for babies. Breastfeeding helps defend against infections, prevent allergies, and protect against a number of chronic conditions. It is easily digestible. The AAP recommends that babies be breastfed exclusively for the first 6 months. Beyond that, breastfeeding is encouraged until at least 12 months, and longer if both the mother and baby are willing. Not only does breastfeeding lead to better nourishment but also intensifies the special bonding between child and mom!

But it requires a mom to be patient, endure possible discomfort and pain, and the mom has to be careful what she eats and drinks. Now I want you to see the spiritual connection. There is no substitute for the Word of God in our daily spiritual lives. We must have a steady diet of God's Word, period. Nothing can compare or take the place of getting into God's Word personally, not personal testimonies, TV preachers, Biblical Commentaries, inspirational stories, Church services or Christian Education classes. And nothing compares to getting into God's Word corporately – with other people. We are ***"to long for the pure milk of the Word"*** Why? So that we will grow ***"in respect to salvation."*** In other words, so we grow in maturity of the faith, so we grow in knowledge, understanding and wisdom. There is no other way. There is no excuse. It is God's revelation to us and we will find it in no other place.

Now last time we say how the Word of God is unique in its composition, in its preservation, in its transmission, and in its impact on others. We looked at the story of Shimabuku, the Okinawan Village where American soldiers had come across during the final months of World War 2 and how that village listened to an American missionary who had visited some 30 years earlier and left them a Bible and told them to follow it, and how it transformed their village of 1000 souls. I witnessed the same thing in the Dominican Republic during our mission trips there in 2010 and 2015. When people put the Word of God into action, it changes lives.

But we have to read it, study it, and put it into action. In closing, I want to share a few more remarkable aspects of the Bible, the written Word of God as it pertains to science. Some like to say this is not a book of science. But we already saw how the first part of the Big Bang Theory and the two laws of thermodynamics are shown in Scripture. But what else? How about the number of stars in the universe? The ancients believed that there were only 5000 stars in our universe because that is all that could be seen by the naked eye. But what did God say in His Word before the advances of modern day astronomy? ***Jer. 33:22: 'As the host of heaven cannot be counted and the sand of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the descendants of David My servant and the Levites who minister to Me.'***

Did the Bible teach a flat earth? Nope. In **Isaiah 40:22** we read: ***"It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.*** The Hebrew word for circle, *khug*, means "sphere".

In **Job 38:12-14**, the earth's rotation is implied when God speaking to Job declares, ***"Have you ever in your life commanded the morning, and caused the dawn to know its place, that it might take hold of the ends of the earth, And the wicked be shaken out of it? It is changed like clay under the seal;"*** Literally, ***"...it (the earth) is turned as a clay to a seal"***, describing either the clay vessel turning on a potter's wheel to receive the impression of the signet ring seal of the potter, or it could be describing a rolling cylinder leaving impressions on the clay, as the light of dawn passes across the turning earth. In either case, this speaks of a rotating earth.

What about invisible germs? It wasn't until the 19th century that we learned about invisible microbes that cause illness. But we see how God's Word already gave instruction for protection against such bad bacteria.

The Lord made a powerful and revealing promise to the Jews: ***"If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in His sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the Lord that healeth thee."*** (Exodus 15:26)

This law was written soon after Israel had been captive in Egypt, where they were exposed to Egyptian technology, including their medical methods. If you look at Egyptian medicine, they were very advanced in some ways but primitive in others. The treatment methods they used were sometimes more deadly than the illness they were meant to treat. They would sometimes treat an infected wound with remedies such as worm's blood and donkey dung! They did not seem to have an awareness of things such as invisible germs that could infect someone.

Germs in cooking utensils: In Leviticus 6:28 there is a command to scour and rinse metal cooking vessels in water after using them, which would have disinfected them. How could Moses have known about dangerous germs in cooking pots?

In **Leviticus 11:35** animal carcasses were declared unclean, and anything that touched them was unclean. This protected the Israelites from invisible, deadly germs. **Leviticus 15:13** talks about using running water to wash when dealing with infectious diseases. Grant Jeffrey, in his book, "The Signature of God," describes how until the last century most doctors, when they washed, washed their hands in a stagnant bowl of water, allowing the germs to remain

People had trouble believing in invisible germs even up to the late 1800s. Jeffrey describes how in 1845 a Hungarian doctor, Ignaz Semmelweis, was disturbed by the high death rate of women giving birth in Vienna hospitals, about fifteen to thirty percent. The doctors in the hospital did not wash their hands between patients, a practice which to us now seems abhorrent. But Dr. Semmelweis instructed the doctors

who were now under his supervision to wash their hands well in water and chlorinated lime between expectant mothers they saw, and the death rate fell to less than two percent.

God in His Word reveals knowledge of washings and other sanitary practices millennia earlier. Medical doctors McMillen and Stern commented in their book, "None of These Diseases": "*Centuries before Semmelweis, God had already detailed the most effective method of washing. To prevent the spread of disease, modern science has merely rediscovered the biblical method.*"

FROM THE ENCYCLOPEDIA JUDAICA – the standard Jewish reference on all things Jewish:

"The uniqueness of biblical medicine lies in its regulations for social hygiene, which are remarkable not only for their period but even by present-day standards. Hygiene and prophylaxis became religious dogmas intended for the welfare and preservation of the nation. Of the 613 commandments, 213 are of a medical nature. Prevention of epidemics, suppression of prostitution and venereal diseases, frequent washing, care of the skin, strict dietary and sanitary regulations, rules for sexual life, isolation and quarantine, the observance of a day of rest – the Sabbath – these and other provisions inhibited the spread of many of the diseases prevalent in neighboring countries."

The Hebrews were aware of the fact that contagious diseases are spread by direct contact as well as by clothing, household utensils, etc. To prevent the spread of epidemics or infectious maladies, they therefore compiled a series of sanitary regulations. These included precautionary or temporary isolation, quarantine, burning or scalding of infected garments and utensils, thorough scrubbing and smoking out of houses suspected of infection, and scrupulous inspection and purification of the diseased person after recovery (Lev. 13–14). Anyone coming into contact with a corpse or carrion, or suffering from purulent discharges from any part of his body, also required a thorough cleansing of himself and his belongings before being allowed back into the encampment (Num. 19:7–16; Lev. 15:2–13). The garments, weapons, and utensils of soldiers returning to the camp after a battle had to be thoroughly cleansed and disinfected to prevent the spread of diseases possibly picked up during contact with the enemy (Num. 31:20, 22–24). The danger of infectious bowel diseases spreading through excrement was also recognized and the Bible instructs how to keep the camp clean (Deut. 23:13–14)."

All this is a direct result of God's Word! He gave it for all people to be blessed, to grow in faith, and to bear testimony to His providential care and concern for our world. All the more reason why we need to be in the Word daily, just as a baby is nourished by the milk of a mother.

So on this Mother's Day, may we be grateful to God for our moms, for motherhood, for the fact that we have been born again through the Word of God. It is one more reason to believe! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!