

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
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The Rev. Dr. David Thompson

A mother's best gift?

Why did God create Eve? When God finished creating Adam, he stepped back, scratched his head, and said, "I can do better than that."

Three proud mothers were sitting on a bench, arguing over which one's son loved her the most. The first one said, "You know, my son sends me flowers every weekend." "You call that love?" said the second mother. "My son calls me every day!" "That's nothing," says the third woman. "My son is in therapy five days a week. And the whole time, he talks about me!"

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord our strength and our Redeemer.

Text: From the mother of Jesus: "Do whatever he tells you!"

Mother's day is the time when we all remember our mothers with gratitude for the gift of our life. The mothers of New St. James I know to be wonderful in so many ways. They are dedicated to their children, old and young, They want to love them unconditionally and they want them to succeed as many are and have. May God bless our mothers this day and may they feel the very real love and affection that is here for them at New St. James.

Today I want to talk about the difference that the confidence of a mother in her child can make! The scene related in John's Gospel takes place in Galilee. Jesus is invited to a wedding, probably of a relative. Weddings went on and on for several days in those days and so the wine was to be kept flowing and it was quite natural that the host might run out. This happened, so Mary the mother of Jesus is consulted as to what to do. Mary has enormous confidence in her son and so she says, "Do whatever he tells you!" They do so and experience a miracle. Water is turned to the finest of wines!

As a minister I watch a lot of parenting going on. But so, so often I have discovered that parents miss one absolutely vital gift to their children. They discipline them, give them good values, perhaps shower them with good things but for some reason withhold the gift of confidence. Why does this happen? Perhaps you have heard parents say this: "Oh Don't praise him too much. It will go to his head."

A friend of mine in High school was called Bill. Bill had a father called George who was one of two sons. George's mother had played favorites. George's younger brother, she loved and protected. He could do no wrong. When he was injured in the Second World War, she overwhelmed him with her love!

George was given an interesting kind of role. He was supposed to succeed and look after the family. He was to go to University because his younger brother was not an academic. But no

matter what George did, his mother never praised him. When George graduated, she expected that. When he got good marks, he was supposed to get good marks. So, although very gifted, George never felt affirmed by his mother. And so, in turn, George had great difficulty praising my friend for anything. He only did it once that he remembers. His sister who was very bright, was top student in her high school. Bill always scraped by. So, on the day when she was picked as Valedictorian, Bill stated that he could never do that and his father said; "Bill you are more gifted than her." Now whether that was the case or not, that amounted to the first time he had ever praised Bill, and Bill never forgot that. He clung onto that one statement not knowing whether to believe it or not.

Bill's dear mother was an excellent mother in so many ways. However, she did not share George's view about Bill's ability. There had been no demonstration of it that she could see. Where were the marks in school? All she could see was a kind of wildness that distressed her. Bill was not interested in school, he just wanted to play 24/7. So, what was there to commend? Also, she had had a tough background herself. No one ever affirmed her when she was growing up. But her daughter was the one to watch and that was very clear to Bill. His mother had no confidence in him. It was not do whatever he says. It was "Whatever you do, don't do what Bill says!" 😊

Here is what I want to say to us all today. Let's not hold back on our confidence in others. Let's affirm the elders at New St. James. Let's affirm the Board of Managers and every one on it. Affirm the members of all our groups. Let's affirm the staff and our marvelous choir. We all know in our hearts that praise and affirmation are far superior to criticism, especially if we want to see this church thrive!

If you are parents and in particular a mother, please give the gift of confidence to your children. It will transform them. Your children ache for it. If you find this difficult because you have had low self-esteem, coming from parents, who in their turn have had low self esteem issues, **you can refuse to be the lineage bearer of that unfortunate legacy.** Break that dark tradition and move into affirmation and joy!

Scripture says that when Jesus was brought into the temple an old man called Simeon affirmed him, saying of him: "My eyes have seen thy salvation which you have prepared for all the nations to see, a light to lighten the pagans and the glory of your people Israel!" This was pronounced over a baby! **There was someone listening to that...** On the same occasion Anna, a prophetess, came into the Temple and began to praise God and she spoke of the child Jesus as the one who was to bring deliverance to Jerusalem. **Someone listened to that too.**

Every year Jesus' parents took him to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. At the age of 12 Jesus took on the doctors of the law listening to them and asking them questions and everyone who heard him was astounded at his intelligence and his replies. Overjoyed when they found him in the temple after setting off without him, **Mary listened to Jesus disputing with the doctors of the law, and took all of it in.** why was she listening?

Scripture says "His mother treasured up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature and in favor with God and human beings." That was one of the results of her

treasuring up these things in her heart. And we wouldn't know about it unless she was sharing these treasures about her son with St Luke who wrote them down for us. Mary was listening to affirm her wonderful son and let him know her confidence in him. What a gift from which we all have benefitted. Do you tell people how wonderful **your** children are? Do your children know that you are their best fan? I am quite sure Jesus knew his mother was in his corner. She was there through everything including the crucifixion...Throughout it all she had given the gift of confidence to her son! So, when they needed wine, she simply said "Do whatever he tells you!" Now that's confidence!!

So mothers, treasure up in your heart anything your child does that you can praise them for. This is a hard world at times and mothering is a sacred duty. Yes, you will fail. Yes, you will mess up with your children and they will mess up with you, but the way forward is always to find a way to praise them, anyhow. An affirmed child will grow in self esteem. Their intelligence, that you can't see, may be hidden under difficult behaviors, but that intelligence will come out if you give your child confidence in themselves. And if your child has confidence in themselves, they will have confidence in you as a mother. So, teens and young marrieds, do you affirm your mother? Do you give your mother the gift of confidence?

Sadia Rodriguez was an exceptional mother of an exceptional child. She had given birth to identical twins; Melody and Jessica. Melody was born with a facial cleft, similar to a cleft palate. Her nose did not have a defined tip. Her eyes were wide set and her hairline was higher than usual. She had a china doll kind of appearance. Sadia made sure in her parenting that Melody knew she was special. The nose without a tip became her 'kissy nose'. Every bedtime Sadia was permitted 5 Kisses on Melody's "kissy nose". When kids asked why she had a funny nose Sadia would reply that is how we tell the twins apart. When asked why the nose was so small Sadia would reply "Does it breathe? Yes. Does it smell? Yes. Is it too small to do its job? No."

One day at school, a fourth grader boy, who was acting up, asked Melody what had happened to her face. Melody began to cry. The incident was related to the Principal who called Sadia in to her office. She said to Sadia "I need to brag about your daughter Melody to you!" As she related the incident Sadia began to cry. Soon the Principle joined in as well. The fourth grader had been mean, and Melody had cried in front of all her friends. It took awhile for the boy to admit that he had acted wrongly and be ready to give a genuine apology. Melody by this time was back in class and so the Principal called her into the hallway and the boy apologized. "It's okay." Melody said to him, "You already said sorry, and I forgave you. People say that stuff to me all the time. It's fine." Now it was the little boy's time to cry. He was ashamed. The Principal affirmed her saying: "It's not fine! You are a beautiful girl and it is not okay that people say mean things!" "But I forgive them!" said Sadia's amazing, extraordinary child. "I love this school" and skipped back to class. When Melody got home, Sadia told her that she did not need to accept people's cruel words. But Melody said, "But Mommy it's okay. They can say what they want. It's my job to forgive. I just don't get it. I don't understand why they would want to be mean about what makes me special. My kissy nose makes me special. What's wrong with that? I love my heart hair. That is part of what makes me special too."

What Sadia had done in spades over the years was to give the gift of confidence to her special child.

Sadia shared with Melody that when she was a child she was teased for her eczema. She told her she had never realized she was pretty until she was eighteen.

Melody gasped, "But Mommy you are so beautiful!"

Sadia said, "So are you baby girl! I am so glad you already know it."

Melody said "Me too. I've known ever since Nicole, (her childhood friend from infancy) ever since Nicole told me I was beautiful when I was very small. That's why she is such a good friend Mommy."

A mother's gift of confidence does not need to be her prerogative alone. We men can do it. Never married women can do it. Single bachelors can. So can single parents. Confidence isn't to be rationed!

When I went to Teacher's College in Toronto, I had a remarkable teacher called Joan Laird whose father was a Presbyterian minister. She had never married and had given herself unstintingly to her profession as an English teacher. She was a brilliant teacher and she was really good at teacher training.

When she came across me, I was an underachiever. One day she strode down the aisle in the classroom and stopped at my desk and said "David you have the wrong opinion about yourself. You think you are not too bright. David you are gifted. Why don't you try? Why don't you prove me right?"

I went home and thought a lot about what she had said and I decided to try. I graduated with straight A's. I would never have done that without that special woman's gift of confidence in me.

The gift of confidence is immense. We all can give it! It can mean the world at the right moment.

The gift of confidence makes the very best of wines. Drink deeply and forever be changed.

Do you need self esteem?

The historical Jesus told us to **love ourselves**. Why not take Mary his mother's advice? Start today, this Mother's day, and **do whatever he tells you**, and then you will move forward with one of the best gifts in the world...Confidence!