

## **“BACK TO BASICS”**

II Timothy 1:3-14; John 14:15-21

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Rev. Jerry Duggins

They got the age wrong in my mother’s obituary. I don’t remember noticing at the time, but it irked me last week when I looked it up. She was 85, not 86, and the dementia took her from us several years before that. She’s been gone three years now, not four as the obituary suggested. The memories of her last few years are giving way to fonder memories: the pleasure she took in her grandchildren, the pride she felt in earning her associates degree after interrupting her education to raise children. There are not many childhood memories. Raising six boys involved a lot of laundry, grocery shopping, car-pooling. I remember the times I’d pretend to have a headache in order to miss school. She’d make toast and bring a glass of milk, never letting on that she knew. She must have known.

Then there was the time I got run over by a car. I was riding my bike and had taken a peak behind me. The car seemed a ways back, so I thought I’d just turn over to the other side of the road and be out of the way. So I started to turn, heard screeching tires, and suddenly found myself dislodged from the bike and laying in the road way. The car hardly touched me, but I was stunned enough that half the neighborhood was there, telling me not to get up, the ambulance was on the way. Someone had run down to my house and fetched my mom, who rode with me in the ambulance. At the time I was more embarrassed than anything, but I never got in the way of what a grownup thought should be happening. So I suffered the ambulance ride. I let them take an x-ray of my knee despite the fact that the tear in the jeans had been there a long time. What I remember today is the worried expression on her face born of the possibility that some harm might have come to her child. From that day, I never doubted her love for me.

There’s one more thing to tell you about my mom. She took me to church and Sunday School nearly every week. It took me a while to find my place socially at school, to feel anything but awkward in my body. Church was the place where I felt nurtured and affirmed. It was in one sense, more home to me than my own home. So when Paul mentions Timothy’s mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois, I think about my mom.

I always want to know more of their stories, but it’s possible that they did little more than bring Timothy along when the faith community gathered. People make such a difference in the world just by including others in the things that feed them. Most moms want to provide these nourishing experiences for their children. Some are more able than others. Lois, Eunice, and Timothy are not Hebrew names, so the household may not have suffered the poverty of many Jewish families. There may have been resources to provide Timothy with an education, good nutrition, and travel opportunities. If we accept that Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, is the author of this letter, it would have been unusual to see the faith passed on to a third generation.

As one of six boys, I was hesitant to ask too much of my mother. My little league experience lasted only two seasons. My tinkering on the piano never resulted in lessons. Stamp collecting, tennis, and chess are interests that survive in some form because they were shared by my parents. As a child, I probably didn't understand the generosity behind the basic necessities, but today I know that not everyone has enough food, clothing, or shelter. At the time I operated under the assumption of scarcity, but the truth was that I grew up in a gift-giving economy.

In our discussion of *Braiding Sweetgrass* last week, we kept coming back to this theme: giving belongs to the very nature of creation. Plants and trees give oxygen that animals breathe in. The soil gives nutrients for plants to grow. The sun gives energy that supports the various cycles of life.

The faith community is nurtured and strengthened by the gifts its members bring. "Rekindle the gift that is in you," Paul tells Timothy, "by the laying on of hands." In I Corinthians 12, Paul talks about the gifts given by the Spirit "for the common good." In the stories of Jesus, forgiveness, comes as a gift. Healing comes as a gift. Food comes as a gift. Wisdom comes as a gift. Deliverance comes as a gift. And resurrection, new life, and faith come as gifts.

Genesis two tells the story of the creation of the human being. From the dust God forms us and breathes into us the gift of life. I see in this image, God our mother, giving birth to new life. Even if we can think of nothing else, we can give thanks for the breath of life given to us by our mothers.

For most of us, this is only the beginning of what our mothers give. For some, it is unfortunately the last. Not all mothers survive childbirth. Some mothers, for a variety of reasons choose not to raise their children. Some simply lack the resources to do everything they'd like for their children. Mother-child relationships are complicated. We don't all have fond memories of our mothers and mothers don't all have fond memories of their children. It's important to acknowledge that and to place in God's hands the hurts that we have experienced as parents and children.

But today, we honor mothers, and acknowledge the love that nurtures parents and their children. We affirm that this relationship is important. And we commit ourselves to developing and sustaining healthy relationships. If we were to apply what Robin Wall Kimmerer says about our relationship to the earth to human relationships, two basic principles come to the forefront: Give what and when can, and take only what we need. It is in the nature of things to give, but when we use up what the earth has to give, nature suffers. It is human nature to give, but when we use up what people have to give, we do great harm.

I'm pretty sure we didn't always get this balance right with my mom, but each of her boys became grateful for what she gave. I like to think we moved from dependence to reciprocity. The bond of love remains strong.

It's a bond that Jesus felt himself in relationship to his disciples. He had nurtured them in faith and brought them to a place where they were positioned for growth when he finds himself saying goodbye. Just before his arrest, death, resurrection and return to God, he tells them, "I will not leave you orphaned." I won't be physically present, but I'll make sure you always have someone to guide you in wisdom, to heal you when weak, to encourage you when challenged, to give to you in your need.

God intends us to always have people in our lives who are as mothers to us. God has placed us in communities of faith whose nature it is to supply our needs. I feel fortunate, like Timothy, to have had a mother, who understood the importance of living in a faith community. I don't know what gratitudes you have to offer up for your mother, but I am grateful to live and work among you. And for that I thank God, but also say, "Thank you, mom!" Amen.