

Sermon

Sunday, May 12, 2019

Charleston, SC

8:00 am & 10:30 am Sermon ~ Joshua 9:3-16, 22-23, John 10:22-30

Motherhood: Fighting Decision Fatigue

The Rev. Al Zadig, Jr.

On this Mother's Day, I love the story of the mother telling her friend, "I have the perfect daughter." The friend says really? Does she smoke? No, she doesn't. Does she drink? Not a bit. Does she ever come home late? Never. Temper Tantrums? Nope. I guess you really do have the perfect daughter. How old is she? Well, on Wednesday of this week, she will be six months old!

Motherhood is a challenge at every stage, in fact, a challenge for another reason. I've found Mother's Day to be a bit of a minefield. For some women, biological motherhood isn't possible and therefore Mother's Day can be really painful. For others, you didn't intend on being a mother and it's painful in a different way. Still others, you had a challenging mother and you're still trying to deal with that. Yet, because Motherhood is where all mission starts, let me level the playing ground and say we were all born of mothers, and whether you are married or not ladies, whether you have children or not, the children of this parish are your spiritual children. We are a family. I have proof. When we baptize little Declan Harb in a moment, I will ask you, "Will you do all in your power to support Declan and his family?" You will say, "We will."

Either way, motherhood is loaded with so much on the line and is truly one of the biggest challenges of life. In fact, here is my list of the top five challenges for mothers, based on my own observations.

5. The Need for outside role-models
4. Stress from too many demands constantly tugging and wearing at you
3. Training of Children, especially in a social media age
2. Monotony and Loneliness
1. Decision Fatigue...just too many decisions!

It's why no one deserves a special day all to herself more than mothers! I loved the cartoon showing a psychologist talking to his patient. "Let's see," he said, "You spend 50% of your energy on your job, 50% percent on your husband, and 50% on your children. I think I see your problem."

The demands and decisions! Yet these challenges are not new with our age. Let me take you deeply into the book of Joshua. Last week we looked at the breathtaking fall of the walled city of Jericho, and despite some early setbacks after that victory, the Israelites as continued underdogs, go on a win streak, including defeating that great city of Ai. Their victories repeatedly continue to surprise and worry the rest of the world, including the people of a place called Gibeon. Gibeon was a large city with a flourishing economy.

Yet when the leaders of Gibeon hear of the military wins of Israel, they are terrified, thinking for sure they would be next. How they deal with this is fascinating! They resort to one of the most ingenious military strategies in Scripture.

Let me set the scene. Gibeon is a three day walk from where the Israelites are, and so, like something out of Monty Python, the Gibeonites take all their clothes and dirty them up, put worn out sacks on their donkeys and take their oldest cracked wineskins and put them on the donkeys. They wear the worst looking worn out sandals and look for the driest, moldiest bread they can find. All of it goes on the donkeys. With all this worn out stuff, they walk the three days to Gilgal where Joshua and his men have camped. Then in an act that even Broadway would celebrate, these Gibeonites walk in with limps, eating from their moldy bread, falsely

saying, "We have come from a far away place.

Please make a covenant with us." Joshua and his generals begin questioning them saying, How can we trust you? How do we know you don't live near us and are trying to trick us? Who are you, where do you come from? With acting skills that could impress Denzell Washington, they say, "We are from far, far away and we've heard the fame of your God and all your surprising victories, how as underdogs you defeated Sihon and Og. Our elders said, go to the Jews and say we are your servants, make a covenant with us." Realizing they might be losing this debate, the Gibeonites go on the offensive. Our bread was warm when we took it for our provisions the day we left to come to you. Now as you can see it's dry, moldy and crumbling. Oh, and these wineskins which we filled when we left, look at them now. The wineskins are torn and dry. Our clothing is worn out, and filthy because of the long journey. The moment of decision. Would the Israelites choose to help them by signing a covenant to protect them? For the Israelites, decision fatigue.

You and I face these critical moments of decision nearly every day of our lives. In fact, researchers at Cornell University estimate we make 226.7 decisions a day, on food alone. And as your level of responsibility increases, so does the multitude of choices you have to make. It's estimated that the average adult makes about 35,000 remotely conscious decisions each day. Mothers, your average is probably 50,000 decisions a day! This decision fatigue refers to the idea that people tend to make worse decisions after having made lots of decisions. Here's how you know you have decision fatigue. If you have a particularly decision-heavy day at work, you come home feeling drained. You might want to go to the gym and workout, but your brain would

rather default to the easy decision: sit on the couch. That's decision fatigue.

And this is where the Israelites go wrong. An error that is the enemy of all mothers, as well as fathers and every human on the planet.

Joshua 9:14 - The Israelites take the provisions of the Gibeonites, but do not ask the counsel of the Lord. They walk away from God in that moment. When I read this passage, that one line jumped out at me like it was 3D. They did not ask the counsel of the Lord. Isn't it fascinating that that detail is so prominent in this story? Had they asked God, God would not have allowed them to make that covenant. And sure enough, three days later, the Jews realize they've been had! Truth be told, these Gibeonite actors lived a stone's throw away! When Joshua realizes he's been had, he confronts them and says, "Why did you deceive us?" They reply, "Because we didn't want to be another statistic."

Those chilling words: "The Israelites did not ask for the counsel of the Lord."

In all my years of ministry, in all my years of watching you do life, this is our biggest collective challenge. I'm convinced that this inquiring of the Lord before action is a learned discipline for all of us, that doesn't come naturally to any of us. I think of the story of a husband who, prior to marriage, decides he'd make all the major decisions and she the minor ones. They actually agreed on this. After twenty years of marriage, he was asked how this arrangement had worked. "Great," he said, "In all these years I've never had to make a major decision." Making the inquiring of God number one in every decision of our lives is a gamechanger for decision fatigue, and perhaps even the challenges of motherhood. But how do we inquire? The answer comes from our Gospel Passage. The Disciples are in great suspense, Lord are you the Messiah? Jesus replies, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them and they follow me."

Here's how it works. When one of those 35,000 decisions a day hit, we pray, "Lord, as my shepherd help me hear your voice." How? By asking one simple question. A question that requires discipline because again this question doesn't come naturally. The question is this - Lord what do you want me to do? Through the Holy Spirit, like a GPS, show me!

How simple is that! Lord, my life is your life. Your life is my life. What do you want me to do? Isn't that refreshingly simple? Lord what do you want me to do, speak to me so I can hear you.

It's simple enough, but hey, the Israelites missed it! You might say, okay, I ask God, but how do I hear the voice of Jesus my shepherd? I believe we hear the voice of God in three primary ways. First, sometimes we literally hear the voice of God answering us in prayer. If we have enough quiet and white space in our lives, we can hear his voice as naturally as the birds of the air.

But secondly, through Scripture. Scripture is God's love letter to us and trying to make decisions without Scripture is like trying to fly a plane with no radar or instruments. Third, God also reveals his answers through those saints around you. I'm talking about those friends of yours who are walking with the Lord. Friends who themselves are walking with Christ. Prayer. Scripture. Gospel Friends.

Mothers, it's just so easy to move from one thing to the next in your challenges. Lord what do you want me to do? Speak to me, through prayer. Speak through Scripture. Speak through Christian friends. I know this is basic, but at the same time, it's profound! Mothers, are you tired this morning? Tired of decision fatigue? Tired of trying to keep it in the road. Let it go! Let it go to the one who knows you more than you know yourself! Give your decisions, worries, anxieties, and mysteries to Jesus, the shepherd of us sheep. Not only will you and your situation be changed, but you will be teaching your children who your shepherd is every time. Because as Mother', everything you do teaches someone about who is really guiding you.

Stop. Ask Jesus, what is your will for me? Lord speak to me, through prayer. Speak through Scripture. Speak through Christian friends. That others would see you Lord, in me.

Here is one thing I know he's saying to all of you in decision fatigue. It comes from Jeremiah 29:11. I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a hope and a future.

Finally this morning, Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, that famed British Preacher of a previous century, had four sons and they were all preachers. One weekend they had a reunion where all the sons and their families came home. An elderly uncle happens to be with them, and out of curiosity says to one of the sons, named Howard, "Howard, who is the greatest preacher in your family?" Howard had a great admiration for his father and looks straight across at him, but then without a moment's hesitation answers, "Mother."

Stop. Lord, what do you want? Lord speak to me, through prayer. Speak through Scripture. Speak through Christian friends.