

**Easter 6 Mother's Day Sunday, May 9, 2021**

**NOTE:** The phone number for Edith printed in the *May Plain Facts* was incorrect by one number. Her correct phone number is **1-705-259-6741**.

The Spring Meeting will be held virtually on Zoom on Sunday May 16 at 1 p.m. If you have any questions, comments, or reports please forward them to Mary Crosby, Clerk.

Church envelopes are available. Contact Shirley for more information.

**Prayer Concerns**

|                          |                 |
|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Wendy Lessard            | Rae Axford      |
| Carl & Leena Sibley      | Sally Paul      |
| Gerry & Jill Coull       | Rose            |
| Marilyn Smith            | George Eastbury |
| Heather Gillard          | Cathy Tredenick |
| Deanna                   | Paula Welter    |
| Faith and Larry Seabrook |                 |

**Pastoral Prayer**

**Mothering God, gather us as a mother hen gathers her brood under her protective wings. Mothering God, bear us up on your wings, like a mother eagle teaching her young to fly. Mothering God, hover above us as we pray, like a loving parent leans over her sleeping child longing to catch his latest sigh. Mothering God, listen to your children praying.**

**Today, gracious God we celebrate what family and home mean to us. Because this is not only Mother's Day but Christian Family Sunday, we celebrate our belonging to a church family. Loving God, we cannot gather with either family as freely as we'd like. Although we are disappointed that we can't share family meals around one table, we are grateful that we can share together on Zoom or Skype, telephone or outside visits. We are very grateful that our loved ones are safe and doing their part to keep others safe, too. Thank you, God, that whether we are alone while savouring our precious memories or sharing laughter and stories with dear ones you are with us. We bask in the essence of your favor and love as we remember and rejoice in the loving relationships that bless and inspire our living.**

**For many people, Mother's Day is a happy day. It's a time to focus on the special women in our lives who daily show us what it means to be loving spouses, parents, grandparents, aunts, friends, mentors, teachers, workers, volunteers and leaders. Thank you for our mothers and the women who taught us the importance of faith, family and friendship. We pray for women who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. We pray that the challenges experienced by women at home, in the workplace, with child-care and elder care will be addressed in ways that are just, economically viable and respectful.**

**For many people, Mother's Day is a painful day. Be close to those who are grieving the deaths of their mothers and mother-figures. Be with women who have lost children or have been unable to birth children. Be with those who did not have a loving mother or have conflicted feelings about their family relationships. We think of all the parents and**

grandparents who have fallen victim to the Covid virus. May their precious memories of their dear ones eventually bring a measure of healing and peace.

Today marks the end of Mental Health Week. We pray for those who struggle with depression, eating disorders, anxiety or behaviour disorders, drug abuse, bi-polar disorder, schizophrenia, Alzheimer's, and other dementias. We ask for strength and patience for care givers and pray for peace and courage for sufferers. Mothering God, we are grateful God that they are not alone in their pain. You walk the path with families and individuals through the dark valleys. We are grateful for the professional help, medicines and increased education about Mental Health which have helped to remove the stigma associated with mental illness. Help us to be a source of caring compassion to those who are facing or coping with illness, infirmity, grief or relationship issues. Share your love through us to extend understanding and empathy. Hide them within the warmth your wings of love!

On Mother's Day, we pray for Mother Earth. The earth has suffered so much due to our abuse of precious natural resources and acts of wanton greed and laziness. Forgive us, Creator! May we open our ears to listen to the stories of indigenous peoples who remember the wisdom of the land. May we open our eyes to appreciate the beauty of wild flowers growing along roadsides. May we use our hands to reduce waste by recycling and reusing. May we open our hearts as we care for our pets, care for livestock, feed the birds and plant flowers that bees need to pollenate gardens and crops. Teach us to respect all life, O Divine Love, for you are the Fountain from which ALL life flows and grows.

On this Christian Family Sunday, we pray for our church family as we continue to hunker down in our homes and avoid large gatherings. Thank you for your love which "binds us together with cords that cannot be broken". Help us, on difficult days to lean hard upon your grace and share our feelings honestly with those we trust. Guide our thoughts and steps to discover things that we can do to make life a little easier for someone else. Fill us with your love that we may obey Jesus' command to love one another as he loves us. Mothering God, thank you for hearing our prayers and for watching over us, always. Amen

### Gospel John 15: 12-17

Jesus said, <sup>12</sup>*"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.* <sup>13</sup>No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. <sup>14</sup>You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup>I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. <sup>16</sup>You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. <sup>17</sup>*I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.*

## Epistle I John 5: 1-6

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. <sup>2</sup>By this we know that we love the children of God, *when we love God and obey his commandments.* <sup>3</sup>*For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments.* And his commandments are not burdensome, <sup>4</sup>for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. <sup>5</sup>Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? <sup>6</sup>This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.

### Sermon: PARTING GIFT

Dedicated in Loving Memory of Mary Helen (Peg) Bell

My mother, if she was alive would be marking her 101<sup>st</sup> birthday this week. With her birthday always being close to Mother's Day, I'd tease her about having to buy double; two cards and two gifts. She would always assure me that it wasn't necessary to buy her anything. In fact, in her later years she got rather emphatic about it. *"Now Margie, I do NOT want to you go to any fuss."*

And just as emphatically, I would assure her that as long as I had a mother, I would go to whatever fuss I chose.

My mother, as many of you know, liked to talk. She told me a lot of stories about her childhood, and her courtship with my Dad. She told stories about life on the farm and about the folks in our rural community. These stories were entertaining to listen to. Mom's eyes twinkled and her mouth curved in a smile as she recited them.

I have to admit that after hearing many stories repeatedly, my attention would shift to other things. Once in awhile my daydreaming would come back to bite me if Mom happened to ask me my opinion on whatever she had told me. "Were you listening?" She'd ask. "I missed that part" I'd say. "Tell me again." And after giving me a bit of a mother -look, she would.

But now that she is in Heaven with my Dad, her stories and her unique way of saying things remain with me. However, some other things she tried to teach me had a tougher time sticking.

A lot of parents have been helping their children, or getting in the way of their children as they've been learning from home due to school closures. When I was in school, my poor mother tried to help me with math homework. I can still see her aproned form standing beside me as I sat at the kitchen table worrying over math problems. You remember, they went like this:

*If a farmer goes to market with 10 pigs in his wagon and he travels 15 miles to get there, and 15 miles to return home, how much money did he sell each pig for?*

Nonsense, right? That's how they seemed to me. Mom would patiently go over the problem with me and try to get me to logically figure the answer. Sadly, at that age in my life, my reaction was, "I don't really get why anyone would care." My mother also attempted to teach me how to sew and bake. The results, at the time, were rather unsatisfactory.

Although my mom was very good at both of those skills, patience was not her strongest suit. After a few attempts trying to keep me on task she would give up. She'd say, "Here, I'll do it." And she would do it. Swiftly and efficiently.

I was mostly good with that. Patience wasn't my strongest virtue, either. We've all had to learn more patience over this past year, haven't we?

Much later in my life when Mom came to St. Thomas to visit, she would comment favourably on my cooking skills. With a hint of surprise in her voice she would say, "Margie, you're a good cook!" That sound of surprise and delighted affirmation popped up other times too, such as when I would report upon her finances after she could no longer manage them on her own. She was pleased to see that her many attempts to teach me some bookkeeping skills were showing some fruit.

I miss her. I miss making a 'double' fuss over her on her birthday and Mother's Day. I know that I am not alone in my feelings today. Many people are missing someone from the family circle today. Maybe she was your beloved mother, or daughter, or grandmother godmother, aunt, sister or beloved friend. Maybe he was your dear dad, grandad, brother or husband. Or maybe your experience is very different from mine.

Maybe your relationship with your parent was or remains conflicted, problematic and painful. Maybe you don't have any relationship with your mother. Perhaps your mother is alive but you've been worried about her well-being due to the Covid-crisis or another crisis since last Mother's Day. Maybe, like I was, you're happy to make a fuss over a loving, and special person both in your heart and in your family.

Whatever is the case, our parents, the adults who raised us and are our first role models. They teach us valuable lessons that will shape our perceptions of ourselves, of our place in the world and of our life of faith. Being a parent carries so much weight and responsibility. No parent gets everything right. My brother once told me that he learned more from his mistakes than from getting things right. I can say an AMEN to that! My mother if she were alive today would readily say that she didn't always make the right choices. But then, who does? Can you imagine what stress it would cause to live under the watchful eye of a person who never made a mistake?

Looking back on her life, Mom had regrets, but they were few. When it came to parenting, she did the best she could from what she had had learned from her own parents. She was a loving partner to my dad, and a loving mother to Roy and me. She was thrilled when her grandchildren were born and she stayed connected to the children she babysat, and to their parents. Some of those folks became known as her 'nother kids. They weren't just friends, they were family.

As loving as she was, my mom seldom said the words, "I love you"; at least, I don't remember it being a phrase that she used with any regularity at all. But I do remember Mom telling me, more than once, that her parents hadn't told her that she was loved. But then she would say, "*But, I didn't need to be told. I always knew by their actions that I was loved.*"

And because she had told me so many stories of her growing up years, and because I had felt my grandparents' love enveloping me every time I stepped into their home or spoke to them on the phone, I fully understood what she meant.

Likewise my mom didn't tell me that she loved me until I was grown up and gone from my childhood home.

But I had always known that I was loved. And as I met women in university and other places and heard some of their experiences with their mothers that were hurtful and traumatizing I realized that my mom was a precious gift from God in my life.

As my mother aged into her 90's age related dementia began to steal into her mind and steal her away. I struggled as she began to change in front of my eyes. Patience still being a challenge for me, I found myself getting impatient with her and frustrated with myself because I was having difficulty coming to grips with the reality that I was losing my mother slowly but surely, even as mom had watched her beloved mother decline. But even though Mother's magnificent memory started to fade and her favourite stories became interwoven she didn't stop loving.

She kept on loving her family. She kept on loving her friends and church family.

She kept on loving her Saviour Jesus, although she seriously wondered, near the end, why it was taking so long for God to get her room ready in Heaven.

And right up to her last breath, Mom was cradled by love. As I mentioned earlier, Mom wasn't one to say "I love you" as a regular thing. But in her final months I would tell her "I love you" before I left her room at the Nursing Home, and she would smile and say "I love you, too". In her final hours, mom was unresponsive due to medications given to her to keep her comfortable. On the last night before she passed, I started to sing hymns to her as I sat beside her bed. Maybe I needed to fill the silence. It felt strange to not hear the space taken up with her voice and her stories. I sang a verse of whatever hymn came to mind. One of them was "Jesus Loves Me." It was probably the first song that I ever learned to sing. One of my earliest childhood memories is Mom encouraging me to sing it for my Grandma.

As Mom quietly rested, I sang the hymns she loved to play on the piano in church. When I was finished, I leaned in close and said into her ear, "I love you Mom."

And without a pause, she replied "I love you too, darlin'". Mom was not a huge fan of surprises, but she surprised me in that moment. Hearing any words, let alone the words she seldom uttered, when I fully expected to not hear her voice again, was a lovely parting gift to me. Yet she merely confirmed what I'd always known to be true.

On the night in which Jesus was betrayed, on the night before he would be crucified and killed, Jesus spoke his last words to his disciples. As they gathered around him, leaning in so as to catch every word, Jesus used the precious minutes he had left to tell them what they needed to hear most.

*"This is my commandment", he said, "that you love one another as I have loved you."*

Margie's translation is: *"Of all the teachings, you've learned from me, of all the wonders you've experienced with me, everything boils down to this basic truth, my friends: I love you. I love you so much, so deeply, so unapologetically that I'm willing to give up my life for love of you. You are my friends. You are my family. You are the reason God sent me. So that you and all people could see how much God loves -- enough to lay down life itself for love."*

*"I love you, my friends. And when I'm gone I want you to keep loving me by loving one another. Through your love for each other people will see it and want that love, God's love in their lives, too."*

Now imagine with me what it must have been like to share those last moments with Jesus, the person that these men and women had given up their homes, comforts, careers, time and reputations to follow. They had known all along that he loved them. He had showed them in a million ways as he listened to their stories, cradled their children in his arms, helped them repair their fishing boats and comforted them when they lost a family member. But to hear him say those words, *"Love one another as I love you"* must have been heart-breaking and heart-lifting all at the same time.

Well, Jesus said a lot of words in his ministry. We have four gospels filled with Jesus words yet they are not the whole of what he did and said while he lived on this earth. Like John says at the very end of his gospel *“I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that could be written about all that Jesus did.”* John 21:25

So even though we’ll never know all of his life story— just as we never know all of anyone’s life story— we know that Jesus’ life was all about love—And because we know Jesus, we know that love is what God’s all about, too.

But where we may have some issues is with Jesus actually expressing his love as a command. *“This is my commandment that you love one another”*, he said to his friends on his last night with them. And just so his friends were sure not to miss his choice of words he said the word command 3 times in the space of 5 verses.

He did this, I think for a couple reasons.

First, Jesus was talking in a manner that made sense to his Jewish friends who knew the 10 commandments and the other rules in the Torah.

Commands were words that were to be taken seriously and internalized. Jesus’ words about loving his friends and them loving each other were not merely sentimental wishes or passing comments. They were to be taken seriously and obeyed as if spoken by God.

The second reason Jesus called his last words a command and a new command, was because he was putting love above all the other laws and commandments that sometimes got in the way of being loving. In another place Jesus said that the two most important commands were to love God with all we that we are and to love our neighbor.

On these two laws, he said, follow all the other commands.

So even though Jesus was giving a new commandment, he was really reminding his friends of an ancient one. Love God by loving others. Love me by loving one another.

If Jesus had been unable to tell his friends that he loved them on that last night, at his last meal, in his last hours, they still would have known it. But, hearing those words come from his lips even as the air grew dense with their collective angst--- must have been a wonderful if poignant parting gift. A parting gift that those followers would need in the hours days, years that lay ahead--- a gift that we need and must lean into every day— as we, the friends that Jesus loves— seek ways to embody and express love as Jesus would do--- as Jesus knows we can do because his Spirit lives in us----

God’s Spirit of love is Jesus’ parting gift, which we get to embody and pass its fruit onto others--- until that day when we see Jesus face to face.

And on that day, we will get to say, “I love you Jesus” and thrill at the sound of his voice when he replies *“I love you, too, my friend. Your room is finally ready. Enter into the joy of your God.”*

Amen