

On the first Sunday in May the young minister was confronted by one of the more outspoken women in the congregations when she said to him (some here have heard this before)

I'm bringing my MOTHER to church on MOTHERS' DAY Reverend and you can talk about anything you want. But it had better include MOTHER and it had better be GOOD.

So I decided I'd bring my MOTHER to church today.



Mothers' Day - does any other day of the year cause the rising up of such a wide range of emotions? As Charles Dickens wrote at the beginning of the Tale of Two cities:

'It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.' I know he wasn't talking about Mothers' Day but it's bit like that.

It's a day to give thanks to our mothers in person, or by some form of communication or by remembering the good in them if they're no longer around.

Sadly it's also a time when some remember the deep wounds that stem from negative relationships with mothers. You don't have to read much these days without coming across some appalling examples of mothering or in most cases non-existent mothering and sadly abuse.

If you no longer have your mother around you'll have your rich storehouse of photos and memories I'm sure.

My **MOTHER, Dora**, was born 100 years ago this September into a home where her mother in particular but not only her mother had a living faith. Her father lived with a debilitating mental illness across all Mum's childhood. This took him from the family when she was 15. He spent the last 10 years of his life at Seacliff Lunatic Asylum as it was called in its day. To say this experience marked her life is to state the really obvious.

Just one thing I want to say from that season – in a time of no domestic purposes benefit or any other support, her family had run out of everything; nothing to live on, nothing to eat; a mother who was unwell and three growing children. My grandmother kept on insisting that the Lord would provide. So when a knock at the door came and someone arrived with a large amount of food, my grandmother gathered her three children at the foot of her bed; she wrapped her arms around them, knelt down and gave thanks to God. Mum remembered her mother saying something like well, isn't that what we expected! As I said, hers was a living faith.

For Mum, her father's illness meant leaving school at 15 and joining the work force, something she always regretted. So much so that when my younger sister sat School Certificate English Mum sat it too. I think they were one mark apart. When she was around 17 she worked in one of the offices at Coull Somerville Wilkie, a huge Dunedin printing company, where as it happened a young man named Graham Wright worked. For new people and visitors that will mean nothing.

Mum eventually began training as a nurse in Dunedin but (so the story goes) she was asked to leave before she'd finished; she completed her training in Nelson where surprise, surprise she was also asked to leave.... Feisty is a word that comes to mind!

Sometime towards the end of World War II she met Dad and they were married at the Mornington Baptist Church on 24 August 1946, two weeks as it happens after Graham Wright married Nina Undrill in Christchurch.

For those who don't know why I'd say that simply let me comment that I married the Wright girl.

What I'd like to do this morning is look at what my mother taught and what I learned from her over the 50 years I knew her. I'd like to do this under three headings:

The faith my mother passed on to me
How she lived out what it means to serve Jesus
Something of the Spirit's work in her days

Some Bible passages first:

**The path of the righteous is like the morning sun,
shining ever brighter till the full light of day. (NIV-UK)**

**The ways of right-living people glow with light;
the longer they live, the brighter they shine. (The Message)**

Proverbs 4:18

I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

2 Timothy 1:5

'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.'

Matthew 23:37

THE FAITH MY MOTHER PASSED ON TO ME

- That **love** is the most important thing; closely followed by laughter – Mum was in her late 70s when this photo was taken.

SLIDE 5

- That **beauty** is all around us if only we would see – that creation is essentially an expression of the Creator's brilliance. She often talked about the changing patterns in the sky and now we live where we do, I often remember her words as another glorious sunrise appears before us.
- That **music** is uplifting to the soul – about 10 days before Mum died we were driving back from an oncologist appointment in Christchurch – we sang so many of the great hymns of our faith – Mum holding the book open so I could glance at the words I hadn't remembered. If it's not a cell phone, it's hymnbook...
- That **sorrow** will touch our lives, but family and good friends undergirded by God's grace will see us through. Sorrow touched her life often as it does all of us but I saw her face her sorrows with courage and an inner strength – indeed her God was a mighty fortress. I spoke with a person this week who's walking with someone suffering greatly – she said 'but so many good things have happened.'

Given those things it's been relatively easy for me to think about God in positive and warm terms – not true of many I know. The fierce judge; the god of don'ts; the god how didn't rescue them.

HOW SHE LIVED OUT WHAT IT MEANS TO SERVE JESUS

- She believed that **kindness towards** and **caring about** others is essential – as a boy I remember swaggers dropping by, possibly quite often (not sure homelessness is new). They would all get something. All through the years there were people she was caring for right up to the end of her days. Talking of being kind. I read last week an article by Christchurch journalist Martin van Beynen about the first 6 months of the new government. He felt kindness may be the one thing Jacinda Ardern will be known for. His last sentence is constructive – after talking about kindness he wrote '**But kindness, like Christianity, might be one of those great ideas that just hasn't been tried yet. It could be that Jacinda Ardern is exactly the person to lead the way – and what a trip it could be.**' We shall see.....
- An extension of this is she believed in being **hospitable** – to be honest we were never sure who and how many would turn up to be received with warmth and food. One delight for the years the Wrights and the Scotts lived near each other in South Canterbury was the afternoons when Trudy's family would arrive. We'd have a great time making sure we did everything our parents told us not to do. I just remember our home as a welcoming home. An inclusive home.
- One of the tribute letters we received after she died said, 'I remember her as a woman of great energy and a wonderful sense of fun. Very much a people person she never seemed to mind how many young people turned up at her house for supper on a Sunday night along with the ones who really belonged to her.'
- She believed that **justice and fairness** are always worth striving for – sometimes it was the government, sometimes the local council, sometimes the medical profession. I have a letter that Keith Holyoake wrote in reply to one of her missives. I'd love to know what she wrote to him. What she taught me was that you always start at the top. However my letter to the minister of ACC last year didn't even get a response. Mum, I need you!
- By **keeping in touch with friends** – she must have been writing to somewhere around 20-25 people regularly and that's without email. We found that out after she died that many of her friends commented that her last letters took on new meaning in the light of her death. I think she knew it was time
- By **seeing what needed to be done and doing it**. Around the time of her funeral a number said who will look after us now and they were all younger than her...

I don't want to make Mum larger in death beyond what she was in life, she had a quick temper - when Rachel and I misbehaved at school Dad would sometimes (not often though) send us home to Mum – just a short journey through the playground to the school house. It was a terrifying walk.... She loved much good food and she would be like a dog with a bone on some issues. I think I've inherited all those traits – thanks Mum!

But I do have this fine example in living a significant response to Jesus.

SOMETHING OF THE SPIRIT'S WORK IN HER DAYS

She belonged to the Order of St Luke – a healing order within the Anglican Church. I went to one or two meetings with her – it was great to hear her praying for those who were sick or in need.

She was onto her third Alpha course, seeking to learn more, be more – or she may have simply been cramming for finals.

The day my father died suddenly at the age of 45 I arrived home at 11 o'clock that night. I couldn't trust my emotions so I opened the back door and went straight to my bedroom. My sisters came in and we stood there no knowing quite what to do or say. Then Mum came in and gathered us up in her arms and whatever she said it was enough.

To me it was an expression of '**how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.**' But later it also connected in my mind to what her mother had done when she was just a girl.

To me Mum lived out the truth of Proverbs 4:18:

**The ways of right-living people glow with light;
the longer they live, the brighter they shine.**

And I will be eternally grateful for the faith that was passed on to me. That's the challenge for all who are journeying towards life's conclusion.

However I realise that what I've spoken today will be very hard for some whose relationship with their mother wasn't like that. Mothers' Day can be painful when it involves thoughts and memories of separation possibly divorce, rejection, suicide, alcoholism, alienation, abuse, sorrow, loss and words like mother-in-law, step-mother etc. etc. etc.

So prayers of thanksgiving and prayers for healing