

Matthew 20:20-23

“Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. “What is it you want?” he asked. She said, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.” “You don't know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?” “We can,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.””

Erma Bombeck is a great source, for humorous insight, about what it takes to be a mother, she once wrote; “for the first 4 or 5 years after I had children, I considered motherhood a temporary condition, not a calling. It was a time of my life set aside for exhaustion and long hours, but this I thought would pass. Then one afternoon, with 3 children in tow, I came out of a supermarket pushing a cart, with four wheels that went in opposite directions, when my toddler son got away from me. Just outside the door, he ran toward the machine holding bubble gum in a big glass dome. In a voice that could have shattered glass he shouted, “Gimme! Gimme! Gimme!” I told him I would give him what for if he didn’t stop shouting and get in the car. As I physically tried to pry his body from around the bubble gum machine, he pulled the entire thing over. Broken glass and gum balls went all over the parking lot. We had now attracted a sizable crowd. I told him he would never see another cartoon as long as he lived for his outburst, and if he didn’t control his temper, he was going to spend his adult life making license plates for the state. He tried to stifle his sobs as he looked around at the staring crowd. Then he did something that I was to remember for the rest of my life. In his helpless quest for comfort,

he turned to the only one he trusted with his emotions – me. He threw his arms around my knees and held on for dear life. I had just humiliated him, chastised him, and berated him, but I was still all he had. That one single incident defined my role, as this child’s mother I realized I was a major force in his life. Sometimes we forget how important stability is to a child. I’ve always told my children, “The easiest part of being a mother is giving birth the hardest part is showing up for it each day.....”

Mother’s do some pretty extraordinary things in raising their children. They also do many mundane, unglamorous, dirty, overlooked, thankless things as well, but one thing is for sure, mom always wants what is best for us regardless of whether we want it or not.

As a child, growing up one of seven children, the smallest of five boys, I was very skinny and boney, but not to my mom. When the football coach laughed at me and asked me if I played an instrument, I knew I had to do something, so I used my paper route money and purchased my first set of weights. My mother made my older brother go with my father and myself to pick up the weights because she knew I could not lift them into the car.

Once I started lifting, my schedule was three days a week, and gradually I progressed to five day workout sessions. Like most people who start exercise programs I quickly grew tired and would have slacked off, if not for my mother. Almost every evening at dinner my mom would ask, “How was your workout?” She seemed to know if I had not worked out, and she would say something about what a difference it was making and how big I was getting.

As a young boy, when I heard those words it was like a shot of adrenaline, it gave me the desire to work that much harder. I look back now and know, I wasn't any bigger, I was still a skinny little boy who others picked on; but not to my mother. When she looked at me she saw a strong rugged young man. What I accomplished on the football field, on the ice, and on the wrestling mat I owe it all to a woman who had more faith and confidence in me than I did myself. Yes, every time I stepped into the athletic arena I believed I could win, but not my mom, she knew I could. I believe, no I know, when a mom looks at her child she sees much more than anyone else, including the child regardless of age.

Who attends every game, rain or shine, mom. Who attends every concert or assembly, regardless of her schedule, mom. Who stays up past midnight waiting, and listening until you come home safe, before she goes to sleep herself, even after you've grown, mom. Who is always full when there is only one piece of dessert left, mom. Who sent money, out of the blue, to you in college when you knew she didn't have it to spare, mom. Mom is the one who complains about the entire band being out of step with you during a parade march. This is why we put this day aside each year to specifically recognize her. But what does that have to do with this morning's passage?

Our first verse tells us, "*Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus.*" Big deal, James and John mother came to see Jesus.

Actually it was a big deal. See upon further study we find when Jesus called James and John, who were called Sons of Thunder by the way, they were at the Sea of Galilee, near Capernaum, in a fishing boat with their father. Both these young men were in the family fishing business. But, if we look back just 3 verses we see Jesus and His disciples are in Jerusalem some 70-80 miles from Capernaum.

This means James' and John's mother journeyed some 70-80 miles, more than likely on foot, maybe by donkey, either way, a long and dangerous trip for this woman. She journeyed this distance with one purpose, to ask Jesus if her sons could sit on His right and left in heaven. Regardless of what it was to take this mother believed with all her heart that her boys could do what it took. She had no doubt about her boys. Like most of the mothers here this morning, you have no doubt your child is good enough to accomplish anything, and you love them even if and when they fall short. How many of you, out of love, would gladly give up anything you have for your children right now, all they have to do is ask.

Matthew says she bowed before Jesus and made this request, *“When you establish your kingdom, I would request seats on your right & left hand for my two sons.”* Many of us might criticize Mrs. Zebedee for her arrogance and/or boldness, but since today is Mother's Day, maybe we ought to think for a few moments about some positive things about Mrs. Zebedee. We also should recognize when she came to Jesus, while Jesus did not grant her request, neither did he deny it.

He simply reminded her of the cost of being seated on the right or left, and then told her it is the Father who determines who will be seated there, not Him.

What are some of the good things about Mrs. Zebedee? First of all, she came to the Lord, praying that her sons might be a part of His Kingdom. I can think of no more important task of motherhood than to seek to ensure your children are a part of the Kingdom of God. I know many mothers pray; sometimes they pray out of necessity. Sometimes they pray because motherhood is not easy, and they need all the help they can get. I have always blamed my mother for me making my college football team. See, two weeks before school began, there were football tryouts and they took place in 100+ degree heat, and I was dying. Yankees do not do well when thrown into the furnace so abruptly. Each day I would head out on the field and each night I would pray I would be cut. Years later while telling this story of how hard it was during those practices my mother said she wished I had told

her I did not want to play, if she had known she would not have prayed each night for the strength for me to make the team. It was because of my mother I made team. Mother's pray for their children even when their children do not know it.

Mother's sometimes pray for strength for themselves because of how hard raising children has become. A friend of mine remembers very clearly the time she gave her 8 year-old daughter, one of her very first responsibilities while eating at the Pizza Inn dinner buffet. After seeing her two children had pizza and drinks, she told her daughter to watch her younger brother, while she stepped over to the buffet line to get some pizza. She was only a few feet away when she heard a loud commotion at their table.

When she turned around she saw her young son of 2½ had taken his drink stood up, turned around and poured it all over the man seated behind them. Meanwhile, her daughter just sat there, looking so innocent. My friend said she asked her daughter, "I thought I told you to watch him." Her daughter answered, "I did." She watched him stand up in his seat, pick up his drink, and then pour it on the man behind him. She did exactly what she was told to do.

Being a mother is not easy. Sometimes it is filled with joy and sometimes with sadness. Sometimes your children make you so proud you want to pop your buttons. At other times you want to break their buttons, and still other times you can't find enough handkerchiefs to dry your tears.

What good is it if our children are successful and making lots of money, driving fine automobiles, and living in good neighborhoods, but they don't know God? What does it matter if they gain the whole world, but lose their souls? Being a mother is not easy. It's difficult, but Mrs. Zebedee gives us a valuable example, she prayed earnestly that her sons would be a part of His kingdom.

Not only did Mrs. Zebedee pray that her children would be a part of Jesus' kingdom, but she prayed they would be actively involved in the work of His kingdom. Are your children saved? Maybe, maybe not! Maybe is not good enough. Churches are full of people content just to fill a pew on Sunday mornings. There are plenty of people willing to sit back and receive God's blessings, but seldom do they get involved in doing any of the real work of the church.

But where does this spirit of service begin? It begins at home, with mothers and fathers setting the example, and praying that their sons and daughters might become involved in the work of the kingdom, as teachers, as leaders, and discipling of others.

Mrs. Zebedee had big expectations; she didn't just pray that her children would be doorkeepers. She wanted them on the right hand and left hand of Jesus. When you're working in a kingdom, there are no higher positions than those on the right and left of the King himself, and that's what she wanted for her sons. That's what we all want for our children. Many may consider Mrs. Zebedee brash and presumptuous, but I admire her boldness. Too often people settle for mediocrity within the church. For too long we have been content with just barely making it through the door. For too long we have been content to just sit back and let things happen. It's time for some of us to take our positions on the right and left hand, to become leaders, molding and shaping the structure and outreach of the church, not just complaining about what's being or not being done. It is time to strive for excellence to reach for the very best there is not only for our children, but for God and His kingdom.

Mrs. Zebedee prayed that her children would be actively involved in the work of His kingdom, and we need to walk in her footsteps, too. I believe that is why today is very special, because we recognize that a mother's love is probably the closest example we have to God's love. It is a love that goes through those dark valleys to bring hope and life. It is a love which sacrifices itself over and over again and would even dare to lay down its life for its own offspring.

There is a story which is told of the holocaust that took the lives of millions of people, of Solomon Rosenberg and his family. This is a true story. Solomon Rosenberg and his wife and their 2 sons, and his mother and father were arrested, and placed in a Nazi concentration camp. In a labor camp, the rules were simple. "As long as you can do your work, you are permitted to live. When you become too weak to do your work, you are exterminated."

Rosenberg watched his mother and father marched off to their deaths, and he knew that next would probably be his youngest son, David, because David had always been a frail child.

Every evening Rosenberg would come back into the barracks after his hours of labor and search for the faces of his family. When he found them they would all huddle together, embrace one another, and thank God for another day of life together.

One day Rosenberg came back from his work and didn't see everyone. He finally discovered his oldest son, Joshua, in a corner, huddled, crying, and praying. He said, "Josh, tell me it's not true." Joshua turned and said, "It is true, poppa. Today David was not strong enough to do his work. So they took him." "But where is your mother?" asked Mr. Rosenberg. "When they came for David, he was so afraid he cried out. Momma told David, 'There is nothing to be afraid of,' then she took his hand and went with him." That's a mother's love. It's as if you're holding God's hand when your mother takes your hand. Mothers, today is your day, and may God bless you in it.