

Good morning! I was asked to preach months ago by your uber prepared Pastor who I think is intelligent and wonderful and am so grateful is here Rebecca (and no I'm not kissing up...I'm not one to make things up...I kinda tell the bold truth a little too often, so I say that with sincerity). When she asked me to preach on Mother's day I knew I had a little one brewing in my belly but no one else did. I also knew she had a theme this year of "each one bring one" AND I also knew that today was ascension Sunday, the Sunday we celebrate Jesus ascending back to heaven after his brief post resurrection visit (unfamiliar to you? Well Jesus died, was buried and then rose again...and for a while he appear to his disciples and others for a final couple weeks of teaching, encouraging and prepping them for what's in store for these people we entrusted to faithfully carry on his example and start the church we now know as the Christian church).

So three themes-**Mothers Day. Bringing a person to Christ. Jesus rising again.** Well thanks Rebecca. Now I'm not so sure how grateful I am to this wonderfully prepared and intelligent Pastor who asked me to preach!

But the spirit has been speaking to me about what to share...particularly at Starbucks at 6:30am this morning, and also prompting me to speak with less words then normal cause you might remember I am long winded and I know that some of your have important champagne brunches to get to. I think God has woven together a pretty basic theme and meaning for all three of the topics I had the opportunity to preach on today.

That theme is what our scripture from 2 Corinthians shares so PERFECTLY about how God calls us to "Come alongside those who are struggling" And that's it. If I were to finish today I would say "Happy Mother's day to all those who have "come along side others" who have struggled, whether you are a mom or not.". I'd also say "If you want people to come to Christ you need to come alongside those who are struggling and model the gracious, forgiving and compassionate love of Jesus". And in talking about the ascension I would say the same thing "Jesus came to earth to "come alongside of us" to model for us what a life of meaning looks like, what it looks like to encourage others and what it looks like to be in deep, authentic relationships with those who might, in fact, change the world. But that would be a little bit too short of a sermon. So here's a few more observations and challenges.

I stand on the border of whether or not I think it's appropriate for the church to celebrate the made up by hallmark and pushed by the flower and "spend your money" industry world we live in day called Mothers Day. On one side of the fence I think these holidays (Valentine's Day, Fathers day etc) are often so commercialized and almost competitive in nature about whose spouse or kid does the best thing and who over does it and whose family loves them more and I don't like holidays that often set a spouse or another person up to fail or disappoint you that I kind of wish we didn't have them. I also understand the value of people feeling important and loved and celebrated. In an ideal world, all people, regardless of their relationship choice or

status as a parent would feel honored, appreciated and celebrated for the ways they selflessly give love and serve others. But I know that isn't the case. So if today is the only day your kids or partner thank you for tirelessly doing things for them before yourself, giving your energy to provide a safe and nurturing environment for them to grow up in, and the only day you allow yourself to take a nap or actually ask for what you need and get it...then Happy Mothers day to you. And I might suggest you "ask for what you need" from your families and kids a little more often too.

But if the church is the church of "coming alongside" others today we need to remember, as well as other holidays that focus on family and the illusion of perfection behind our closed doors of our homes, that today is a hard day for a lot of people.

Today I honor my own mom who did the right things as a mom even though she grew up with a mom who had alcoholism and depression which colored their childhood and ultimately ended in her death when my mom was in her twenties, leaving my mom to grieve for many many mothers days to come. I honor how hard she had to work to not repeat the pattern of unhealthiness and how incredibly she deeply loved me to help me become an adult.

Today I honor women who have wanted to get pregnant for a very long time and have yet to find the person with whom to start a family even if they love deeply and want to nurture a child.

Today I honor those who desperately want to be moms and they haven't been able to conceive and this day holds a painful reminder of that.

Today I honor the moms who have had miscarriages, or had still births or whose children have passed away too young.

Today I honor those of you who have moms who loved and raised you and have passed away and that you deeply miss.

Today I honor those of you who are now taking care of your own moms because they have become like children again in their old age and your roles have reversed.

Today I honor dads who fill the role of both mom and dad due to being a single parent or living/raising a child with a mom who isn't capable of loving their child in the way they have chosen.

Today I honor moms whose kids have broken their hearts...kids who have chosen drugs or alcohol or toxic behavior that have broken their spirit and yours. I honor those of you who have prodigal kids who are wandering and I pray deeply that you can forgive yourself and we as a church can hold out hope with you for their healing and recovery.

Today I honor those who have birthed children or adopted children and who wanted to be parents and have been great ones.

AND today I honor those who don't want to be moms ever but are people who still nurture and love and give generously of their time to serve others.

Here's the thing- In my 10.5 years as your youth pastor I have never been and didn't want to be a mom. The pressure at my age to be a mom to add some kind of "value" to my life was one I was so frustrated by for so many years....as if I wasn't living a full life until I decided to mother my own child. Sometimes I wanted to scream "I HAVE ENOUGH WORK MOTHERING AND CARING FOR YOUR OWN CHILDREN HOW WOULD I POSSIBLY EVER HAVE TIME FOR MY OWN"...which is a little exaggeration. And while I will now happily become a mom somewhere around September 23rd of this year, my value as a Youth Pastor, Wife and Daughter has not, and will not change just because I become a mom. Sometimes I am angry about a holiday some teens felt obligated to honor moms who have chosen drugs or alcohol or abuse or neglect over parenting. This day would make me sad for teens whose moms had recently died. I'm not sure I'm a fan of Mothers day so much.

But I am a fan of "Coming Alongside Others Day"

We all are people of value whom God called to love others and to nurture faith in those around us whether because we birthed them or because God put them in our lives.

So, like the disciples who Jesus specifically choose to honor, nurture and walk alongside and entrusted to help start his church, I want to celebrate the "coming alongside" characteristics that Jesus modeled, his disciples tried to live by and we as broken people need to work on emulating.

Today I recognize

- the three people who continuously go to jail visit a student who in midst of generous love from these ladies, chose to abuse their trust by using, doing illegal activity from their home or lying to them. I honor these women because they have their own kids and own families to love, but they have chosen forgiveness and love and every single week this student has a JYM visitor...or a letter from a church person. Her mom, who has been in San Jose multiple times since her daughter has been in jail has never visited. I recognize those who have chosen to be this 18 year olds mom, even though they could have walked away and had every right to.

-I recognize all of you who have picked a neighborhood kid, or a student at your child's school, or a little one at this church to model sacrificial love to. I recognize those of you who teach, who

counselor, who mentor, who listen and who are available to come alongside families and nurture other peoples kids. Because God knows it takes a community and a village.

-Today I recognize the generosity that has helped a family of one more and three young girls in our church stay in their house at least another month, helped pay for their kids camps and mission trips and helped pay for legal fees when the family in crisis. I recognize Linda Russo, who didn't know this family at all and decided that when a need to stay with the younger girls once a week with the younger girls because of a court order she would step up and be present in their home so the mom could keep working. And when the need wasn't ordered by the court anymore, she decided she would still come and stay with those girls. By choice. and because of that, last week at the HOPE service the 6th grader from our church stood up during open mic time and said "I've had a horrible year. But I can't believe how well I am loved by so many people. Do you know there is a woman from our church we didn't know before who chooses to come our house and be our friend even though she doesn't have to? I am so loved"

-Today I recognize you if you are relearning how to love and nurture yourself- whether because you've been battling your own high expectations for so long, or you never had healthy self care modeled to you or because you have become your own worst enemy. I honor work because until you can learn to accept the specifically created and wonderfully gifted person God has created you to be, your call to love and nurture the world will be futile.

-Today I honor the BootCamp family with over 250 people who have come through the church doors to workout with me on MWF in four different classes in the really early mornings. I specifically honor the crew that has acted like Jesus to a family who has had horrific tragedy. Andrea came to Bootcamp 16 months ago and was extremely nervous to come in the doors of a church as a gay woman , based on treatment by the Christian church because of her sexuality. She was also 365 lbs. Andrea's wife has had cancer for 7 years and they have two boys they adopted and loving raise together- a 6 and a 10 year old who has special needs. Since last January Andrea has lost 80 lbs, run many races but MORE important than that, has come to know God. Why? Because about 10 women from BootCamp have "come alongside" her family to show them what the love of Christ looks like- 3 months ago she set up a help page to help her family as her wife is now homebound on hospice care. Within hours the BootCamp women signed up to do their laundry and bring meals to their home. So much so and so quickly that the rest of that families friends were asking who all these people were that took all the jobs for the entire month for their family? On top of that, two weeks ago when Shelly was in too much pain and Andrea had to go above and beyond to care for her and Andea couldn't plan her sons 10 year old birthday party, I asked Erica Ganz, from our church and one of the bootcamp ladies to help Andrea with the party...cause if you know Erica, you know she throws rocking parties. Ercia, the mother of two young girls, stepmom to three adult children, who didn't know

anything about Harry Potter but spent a week planning the best birthday party Tyler ever had- food, decorations, themed gifts etc. Because of the people who have "come alongside that family" Andrea came into a relationship with God about 9 months ago. Last week she came to church HOPE service. She took communion.

We, as the church, if we are ever to bring others to the God of redemption and deep, compassionate love are called to BECOME FOR ONE ANOTHER WHAT OUR BROKEN FAMILIES AND WORLD HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO PROVIDE ON THEIR OWN.

Jesus said it to his disciples. Leave your mother and father and follow me. We become family to one another. We are a chosen family. And for the church to be a "chosen family" of nurturers who are affective at bringing others to Christ, we have to stop seeing our blood relatives as the only ones we are called to care about. When you decided to make a commitment to follow Christ and serve the church, you signed up to become a wounded healer- to use your gifts and skills to help heal brokenness in others and point people to the life altering relationship with Jesus that saved you.

The world outside our doors- and often time the people sitting in their pews/chairs are too busy for more events and programs, potlucks and parties. We don't live in a culture anymore where people are looking to add an "event to their schedule" Families are battling which of the 3 options of meetings, studies, sports games and volunteer events they might choose to do every single night of the week. People aren't looking for mega events or flashy worship anymore- If we take a look at the deep needs of people near to us in relationship most people outside the church, those we are called to bring into the church are looking for authenticity. Honest..bonding..sharing...community building. We don't have to DO more for people to come to church but we have to let our faith overflow in our behaviors outside of our church...we have to talk about it not like an advertisement but like a conversation...not a begging, but a deep interest in the lives of those outside our walls. For us to be effective in our "telling others" about who Jesus is, we need to BE Jesus to them. When their families are falling apart we need to bring them a meal. When they are struggling we need to show up. When they are discouraged we are people of encouragement. When they need their laundry done, the dishes washed, their kids picked up from school, we say yes...because in the moment of service and nurture we provide to a stressed out person outside our walls...we are more like Jesus than when we hold a BBQ.

Jesus didn't have to advertise himself...by his character and his depth, people came. He was honest and bold and he was holy and healing. And while he had crowds, he invested in deep relationships with a few committed people. He came alongside not particularly influential people, but people with whom he could and did share his life with...and they with him. And he

was only present with them for a short time. But his influence was deep. What was cool with the ascension was how deep they missed him. They grieved his death so much. They wept. They felt betrayed..and then he came back and it was miraculous...they were excited and they were encouraged. When Jesus ascended they knew their work had begun. It was time to BE the church to the world.

That meant sharing what they had in common like it said they did in Acts.

That meant sacrificing comfort

That meant speaking boldly

That meant listening to the deep struggles and pains of a broken world

That meant giving self- sacrificially of their time, energy, resources and sometimes their lives

Jesus did. And he called us to do it. Not just if we have chosen to become moms but if we have chosen to become children of Christ's. It's our obligation.