5-12/13-18 Rev. Amy Haines

1 John 5:9-13 Trust the Testimony Easter Season Series

What have you learned from the women in your life about life and love, faith and perseverance? Someone once created a list of the things our mamas taught us.

See if any of these were sayings you heard from your mamas or grandmas:

- My mama taught me to appreciate a job well done:

"If you're going to kill each other, do it outside; I just finished cleaning."

- My mama taught me religion:

"You better pray that will come out of the carpet."

- My mama taught me logic:

"Because I said so, that's why."

- My mama taught me stamina:

"You'll sit there 'til all that spinach is finished."

- My mama taught me about weather:

“It looks as if a tornado swept through your room."

- My mama taught me about the circle of life:

"I brought you into this world and I can take you out."

- My mama taught me about genetics:

"You're just like your father."

- My mama taught me about anticipation:

"Just wait until you get home."

- My mama taught me wisdom:

"When you get to be my age, you'll understand."

 --“The Coaching Voice” 5-13-12 homileticsonline.com, adapted

There is much in our lives that our mothers, and our fathers, have taught us about life, about love, about faith.

Yet how often did you truly believe what your mother told you? Most of us would probably admit that at times, we didn’t or don’t believe our mothers.

Peggy Hoppes, who writes a daily blog on the lectionary Scriptures, says that her kids often don’t believe what she says or listen to her advice. She once wrote:

...My kids don’t believe what I say. Well, it isn’t that they don’t believe everything I say, but they don’t believe some of the things I say. For example, I can tell them a bit of knowledge about science, but they will not believe that it is true until they hear it from a science teacher. I was constantly frustrated by this lack of belief, especially since they usually shared the ‘new knowledge’ with me as if I had never said it in the first place. They would come home from school and say, “Guess what I learned today?” And then when I hear the lesson, I answer,

“But I told you that a week ago and you didn’t believe me.” They usually responded with something like “Oh, I don’t remember you saying that.”

 --Peggy Hoppes, A Word for Today, 5-18-09

How many of us have felt invisible when it comes to not being believed by others? How many of us also would confess that the older we get, the more we wished we would have listened to our mothers?

Now none of our mothers were perfect. Some had more rough edges than others. Some of us may have lost our mother at an early age, or had an absentee mother. Some of us may have had many mother figures. On this Mother’s Day weekend, give thanks to God for those who mothered you, biological or not.

And give thanks especially if you were blessed with a praying mother or grandmother. Even if your faith journey is different than hers, give thanks for seeds of faith planted by our mothers and grandmothers, by Sunday School teachers and youth leaders, female and male. Give thanks to God.

Then consider—what is it about our faith ancestors, living and dead, related to us or not, that we believed their testimony of faith? We won’t believe them that broccoli is good for us, so what makes us believe their testimonies? What made them a reliable witness to who Jesus is

and what a difference Jesus can make in our lives?

We live in a skeptical society. How many of you believe everything that you hear on the news or read on Facebook? Anyone? How often do you hear a news story and wonder what is the rest of the story?

Sometimes we struggle to trust the voices around us because we have been hurt by mistakes and misinformation in the past. Sometimes we reject the voice of another even when they are telling the truth.

Back before Facebook, I would often get these incredible stories emailed to me. Then I checked snopes.com, and many of these stories that appeared to be too good to be true were. They were false stories, fake news, or half-truths. When I responded back with the truth, sometimes the sender would insist the story was true. Even if they weren’t there. How often our human nature wants so badly to believe that we don’t take the time to delve deeper, to find more details, to hear the rest of the story.

Consider how many voices compete for your attention every day. What voices do you trust?

Who do you believe is telling you the truth? Who would you consider a reliable witness with a believable testimony? Do you believe reporters when they tell us the news? Do you believe teachers when they tell us about history or science or math? Do you believe advertisers when they tell us what we need to buy? Do you believe the government when they tell us how they will solve a problem? Do you believe your peers when they share gossip as truth? Do you believe your parents when they give you advice? Do you believe your doctors when they make a diagnosis? Do you believe the claims of the latest natural cure?

Do you believe your pastor or Sunday School teacher when we preach and teach about the love of God? Do you believe the Bible as God’s Word for our lives today? Which voices today do you believe and listen to? What testimonies do you consider true and trustworthy?

Even though the words testimony, witness and evangelism have been wrapped up in negative connotations of pushy Christians shoving religion into the face of others, they are simply words that remind us we each have a story to share, a story of what we have seen and heard and experienced. In a court of law that testimony is being a witness to a crime. In a classroom that testimony is sharing what one has learned. And in our faith lives that testimony is our story of what we have seen and heard and experienced of God’s Son Jesus in our lives. Do we have reliable testimonies, especially about our faith in Jesus Christ?

Despite the skepticism of today’s society, our human nature still yearns to believe the best in one another. As our Scripture says today, we do still take human testimony at face value. We accept what others say to us as truth. We are still inclined to take people at their word, to give them the benefit of the doubt. That is our human nature.

If we are so willing to receive and believe in human testimony how much more then should we believe the testimony of God? And what is God’s testimony?

“God gave eternal life to us, and this life is in his Son. The one who has the Son has life.

The one who doesn’t have God’s Son does not have life.” (v. 11-12 CEB)

Blogger Peggy Hoppes reminds us:

.. God does not make mistakes. We can believe what He has told us. We can believe that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. We can believe that through the water and the blood—through His life and His death—we have been given the blessedness of forgiveness and eternal life. Isn’t it funny how we are quick to believe people but we often doubt God’s Word?

I don’t know about you, but I’m often wrong. I don’t have all the information or I base my opinion on my own biases. We all make mistakes. We have to discern whether or not to believe the things that people say. The experts in fields of study do not even agree; some even give totally opposing answers to the same question.

.. If we can believe the reporters, teachers, government and pastors, we can believe God.

But God does not leave us without witnesses. Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit stand also as witnesses to the great work God has done for us. The water and the blood stand as witnesses

to the forgiveness we have in Christ Jesus. Baptism and the Eucharist stand as our constant reminders that God is faithful and true to His promises.

 -- Peggy Hoppes, Midweek Oasis, 5-20-09

Unlike so many in our skeptical society, we can believe that what God says is true and trustworthy. We can believe in God’s witness to God’s Son Jesus.

And who or what has also given testimony to a crucified and risen Savior and Lord? Who or what is God’s evidence that what God says is true?

The Holy Spirit gives witness. Christ’s baptism gives witness. Christ’s death upon a cross gives witness. These all testify to the saving love of God through Jesus.

The early Christian community also gave witness to Jesus. Many in those early communities saw and experienced firsthand how Jesus saved their lives, and responded with the sacrificial testimony of their lives.

The next generation of Christians who were persecuted by the Romans willingly were martyred in the coliseums because they believed wholeheartedly in a crucified and risen Savior and Lord.

Although we can no longer see Jesus in the flesh, Jesus is no less real to you and I. We, too, can experience the love and grace of Jesus, which then calls us into being living witnesses, sharing with others our stories of changed lives through faith in Jesus. We, too, are called to be living witnesses, to give evidence of Jesus’ presence in our lives through our word and action,

lives where love is spoken and lived out.

Yet our testimony is only as strong as our abiding in Jesus, our knowing God in intimate relationship, our journey as a disciple of Jesus. The longer we know Jesus, the more we ought to act like Jesus.

Max Lucado once observed,

“People who live long lives together eventually begin to sound alike, talk alike, and even think alike. As we walk with God, we take on his thoughts, his principles, his attitudes. We take on his heart.’”

-- Leadership from the Heart Participant Book p.28

As we take on his heart, we take on his love. As we take on his love, we are then called to share that love with others.

..When Robert Ingersoll, the notorious skeptic, was in his heyday, two college students went to hear him lecture. As they walked down the street after the lecture, one said to the other, “Well, I guess he knocked the props out from under Christianity, didn’t he?” The other said, “No, I don’t think he did. Ingersoll did not explain my mother’s life, and until he can explain my mother’s life I will stand by my mother’s God.”

 -James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited, Tyndale, 1972, p. 381.

We are called here today to not only believe the words and actions of our mothers, but more importantly to believe the word of God concerning the gift of Jesus. Once again, 1 John 5:11-12 reminds us:

“And this is the testimony: God gave eternal life to us, and this life is in his Son. The one who has the Son has life. The one who doesn’t have God’s Son does not have life.”

Once again, 1 John is blunt. Without an intimate relationship with God through faith in Jesus,

we are calling God a liar, refusing to believe God’s story for us. A story of forgiveness, love and new life. A story of life and eternal life. Without faith in Jesus, then we also do not have the gift of eternal life.

Here the author of 1 John echoes the author of the Gospel of John.

Jesus in his final prayer for his disciples prayed: And this is eternal life, that they [my disciples] may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (Jn 17:3)

We have been promised eternal life through our belief in Jesus as the Son of God. Yet this eternal life is not simply life in heaven with God for all eternity. This eternal life is not just fire insurance, saving us from hell through our faith in Jesus.

Rather, for the writers of John and 1 John, eternal life is a future and present reality. It is less about eternity and more about life, life as a quality of existence that death cannot destroy.

This is not simply waiting for a better time, by and by, but loving God and one another in the midst of living saints and skeptics. Eternal life is a gift from God, only given through faith in Jesus, an everlasting assurance as well as an ongoing presence.

For John eternal life begins the moment we begin to live by faith in Jesus, and is less about eternity after death and more about the current state of our relationship with Jesus. What is the evidence of such eternal life? 1 John has been offering such evidence all along—eternal life is seen in how we love one another, how we sacrifice for one another, how we obey Jesus’ commandments to love God and love one another. Eternal life is seen in how we abide in Jesus,

and how we reflect Jesus’ life and light. Even in the here and now.

Alicia Meyers explains eternal life in this way:

.. According to 1 John, those who are experiencing eternal life are those who are inspired by God’s Spirit to speak truth and to live out love that is consistent with God’s revelation through God’s Son, Jesus Christ.

-Alicia Myers 5-13-18 workingpreacher.org

Eternal life reflects life with Jesus. Our testimony then, is a witness to Jesus’ presence in our lives. What of God have we seen and heard and experienced through faith in Jesus, lived out among the community of faith, empowered by the Holy Spirit? My prayer for you today is that you may come to believe, come to trust, come to have faith in God’s testimony concerning Jesus. The early church struggled to accept that Jesus was both human and divine. Nowadays we may struggle to accept the gift of Jesus as relevant and empowering in our lives.

Yet God wishes for each and every one of us to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that we are beloved children of God who have been saved by sin through the blood of Jesus and given the gift of eternal life with God in both this life and the life to come when we turn to faith in Jesus as our Savior and our Lord.

If you do not have such an assurance of faith or if you have not received the gift of eternal life

through the gift of belief in God’s Son Jesus, I invite you to pray to Jesus during our closing song today. Welcome him into your heart and your life.

Trust in God’s testimony, receive God’s gift of forgiveness, faith and eternal life, and begin or renew a journey with Jesus that will draw you closer into the truth of God’s Word each and every day.

Reflecting the final verse in our passage today,

“I say these things to you who believe in the in the name of God’s Son, Jesus, so that you can know the gift of eternal life.”

Treasure such a gift and live by faith, this day and always.

May it be so. Let us pray.