

1

142 years ago in 1870 Julia Ward Howe made a proclamation about mothers. You may not be familiar with her statement, but you may have heard about her role as an activist for social justice and for her work to help get women the right to vote. She was a writer and an eloquent speaker, and you may even know a hymn she wrote: “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.”

She was also a loving mother, and Howe was concerned that people were making decisions about sending sons to war, so she wrote a proclamation taking a stand against war:

Arise, then, women of this day! Arise all women who have hearts, whether your baptism be of water or of tears! Say firmly: "We will not have questions decided by irrelevant agencies. Our husbands shall not come to us reeking of carnage for caresses and applause. Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy, and patience. We women of one country will be

too tender to those of another country to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs."¹

In her proclamation Howe encouraged women to meet together to “take counsel with each other as to the means whereby the great human family can live in peace.” Although she wasn’t at that time able to get an official day to recognize mothers, we gather here now 142 years later and join 46 countries across the globe that celebrate a form of Mother’s Day on days scattered across the calendar.²

Howe recognized that in war we destroy a portion of the great human family, and I imagine she would have agreed with the biblical writer known as John who wrote about 1700 years before her. John wrote three letters to the church, and in the first he penned: “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God...Since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.”³

2

He then used the imagery of family to describe our relationship with Christ: Those who trust Jesus have “been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.”

Part of living in a family involves trying to get along, which brings up the idea of rules, or as John called them, commandments. John used the imagery of family to try and describe our relationship to God. Just as we follow the rules in our families since we love our parents, John suggested that we follow God’s commandments since we love God.

Most families have rules of some kind or another, right? What are some of the things you learned from your mother about how to get along with others? ...

Here’s a humorous look at what our mothers might teach us about how to get along in families:⁴

- 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 contortionism: "Will you look at the dirt on the back of your neck!"
- 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 envy: "There are millions of less fortunate children in this world who don't have wonderful parents like you do."
- My mama taught me wisdom: "When you get to be my age, you'll understand."

No matter how much parents love their children, sometimes our kids can push our buttons, as did one little boy who had been put to bed several times one evening, but he kept calling out “mama” asking for one thing or another. The patience of his mother, Sarah Green, was running out, and so when

3

he yelled out “Mama, I’m thirsty,” Sarah replied, “If you yell *mama* one more time, you’ll be in big trouble.”

For a little while, all was quiet. Then Sarah heard a small voice quietly ask, “Mrs. Green, can I have a drink?”⁵

Even in the best of families, we all mess up and do something that disturbs the harmony. We push the limits, we break the rules, or we get plain grouchy. Once again John uses the imagery of family to explore what happens when we break the rules: “If you see your brother or sister committing...a sin, you will ask, and God will give life to such a one.” Even when we push the limits and make mistakes, God continues to offer us new life and another chance.

And sometimes the hope of that new life comes from the most surprising place in our families, as was the case for one grandmother in Wisconsin whose house went into foreclosure. As a foster parent, she had taken into her home over a hundred

children through the years, many of them in emergency situations who had been dropped off on her doorstep in the middle of the night. Even though she had given much to the community, the bank only was concerned about the money she owed. This past January her only biological grandson, Noah,

found out about the situation from eavesdropping on a conversation between [his grandmother] and her daughter. Deciding he wanted to help his grandmother out, he posted a message on a site called Noah's Dream Catcher Network asking for the \$10,000 needed to catch up on her payments.

"I want to give her her home back for Valentine's Day!! I need to raise \$10,000 by the end of Jan to help her. It seems like sooo much money but if I have 400 friends who can spare \$25.00 I can give her this gift!! Only 200 friends if they give \$50.00," he pleaded on the website.

④

"She helps a lot of people, like foster children, and it would be more than me that just suffered," Noah said.⁶

In February he showed up at his grandmother's bank with a bunch of checks, many from people the family didn't even know. Noah explained, "I learned there's a lot more good people in the world than I expected. Normally when people think of the U.S. they think of a lot of greed—but really that's not what it is."

Noah knew that we are all born of God, part of the same human family. When one part of the family is suffering, somehow we all sense the pain. Even at

his young age, he knew that he could do something to help alleviate some suffering in the world by helping his grandmother and the children she cared for.

On this Mother's Day, may you celebrate not only your connection to your mom who helped you learn how to get along with others, but may we also celebrate that we are part of a family that extends beyond the boundaries of religions and countries, for we are all born of God.

¹ www.mothersdaycelebration.com/mothers-day-proclamation.html

² www.mothersdaycelebration.com/mothers-day-history.html

³ 1 John 4:7, 11.

⁴ *Homiletics*, May 2012.

⁵ Story adapted from *1002 Humorous Illustrations*, Michael Hodgkin, p. 255.

⁶ Steve Hartman, "12-year-old saves grandma's house from foreclosure," February 10, 2012, www.cbsnews.com/8301-18563_162-57374955/12-year-old-saves-grandmas-home-from-foreclosure/