

FCCW Worship 7/13/25

“Lessons from My Mother and Jesus”

Scripture Readings

Genesis 18: 1-8 (NRSV) hospitality

18 The Lord appeared to Abraham^[a] by the oaks^[b] of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. ²He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. ³He said, ‘My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. ⁴Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. ⁵Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.’ So they said, ‘Do as you have said.’ ⁶And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, ‘Make ready quickly three measures^[c] of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.’ ... ⁸Then he took curds and milk ... and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

James 2: 1-5 (NRSV) fairness

² My brothers and sisters, do not claim the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory while showing partiality. ²For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, ³and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, “Have a seat here in a good place, please,” while to the one who is poor you say, “Stand there,” or, “Sit by my footstool,” ⁴have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?

Ephesians 4: 1-3 (NRSV) love

⁴ I therefore, ... beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Thank you, Carol, for your beautiful reading.

Sermon slide

Good morning, everyone. It’s wonderful to be here with all of you on this cloudy but lovely summer day.

I hope you won’t mind indulging me today as I talk a bit about my mother, Josie, pictured here on the screen. She had a very fulfilling life and died peacefully three weeks ago at age 100.

You'll recall that Jonathan Goodell recently talked about the word freedom, and three of its variations: freedom from, freedom for, and freedom with. Last week, Christianne Dutton discussed our three marching orders for ordinary time: make waves, widen the circle, and affirm the gifts. Inspired by their triple-themed approach, I'd like to share some thoughts about three enduring qualities of my mother: hospitality, fairness, and love. And whoever is on for next week, you've got to start thinking about your triple-theme!

Hospitality, Fairness, Love slide

To ground us, I looked for scripture that address these values and could help to remind us of the importance of practicing them.

In the reading from **Genesis**, God appears to Abraham in the form of three travelers, and Abraham - always ready to recognize the possibility of divine presence - immediately offers them hospitality. He calls to Sarah to prepare food and drink for the strangers, which they enjoyed beneath a tree. The passage highlights Abraham's unwavering faith, his understanding of God's promise, and his commitment to showing kindness to all. It also exemplifies the culture of Abraham's time - that hospitality was the greatest expression of godliness.

The Greek word for hospitality, *philoxenia*, literally means 'love for strangers.' It's interesting to think of how the concept of hospitality - welcoming and caring for others - is established as a spiritual practice in the very first book of the bible, and then repeated right through the New Testament. We see it when Jesus shares meals with sinners and outcasts, when he encourages his followers to open their homes to those on the margins of society, and in the miraculous story of feeding 5,000 people with only five loaves of bread and two fish.

In **James**, we're admonished to not show favoritism and to treat all people with the same love and respect regardless of social or economic standing. The message is that in order to have **true** faith in Christ, one cannot engage in discrimination or prejudice. James says that that kind of judgement not only hurts people, but also promotes evil thinking and leads to further negative impacts in society.

Practicing fairness is reiterated in Paul's letters where he reinforces the importance of equality. He emphasizes the unity of all believers of Christ, transcending social, ethnic, gender, and economic differences. The James and Paul lessons outline a vision of fairness that represents God's impartial character and Jesus' compassion towards all. They urge us to look for, and see, the value in all people and treat every person with dignity.

The passage from **Ephesians** takes on the topic of love - one of **the** most central biblical themes. It invites us to live out our Christian values by interacting with one another

with humility, gentleness, and patience. In other words, to put others before ourselves, to be considerate, and to bear with one another through moments of frustration. The reading reminds us that love – as our foundation and motivation – is the vehicle through which we can practice these virtues. And when we live a life like that – one that reflects our Christian faith – we can, together, promote unity and advance peace.

Of course, Will and Maeve teach us about these concepts all year long. I actually think we as a church, and as a congregation, practice the values of hospitality, fairness, and love very successfully – actively, purposefully, and outwardly. And I also know that through our church ministries, and in our individual lives, we’re always striving to do more to help one another, our society, and the planet. Let’s stay at it.

Happy 100th Birthday slide

This is a page out of our 2025 family calendar. It’s for the month of February when my mother, Josie, turned 100. She was born on the 5th and so her birthdate was “2-5-2-5” as she always liked to say.

You can see her broad smile in every picture. I didn’t have to go hunting for smiling photographs of her to make this page. She was always smiling. She was a joyful person. She was also very funny. She had a quip or a one-liner for nearly every topic. When we told we loved her, she always said, “I loved you first!” My siblings and I are currently compiling a list of “Josie-isms” and the list keeps getting longer as we fondly remember more and more of them.

Although centenarians are not as unusual as they once were, you still might feel like asking one what their secret to longevity is. My mother would have probably said that ‘not worrying about things’ was her key to a long life. That may be partially true, but I think it was about much more than that.

Josie was a mother of four, a psychotherapist, a volunteer, and the “Chaplain’s wife” at Williams College (she would like the order of those titles). She devoted her life to those roles. As the Chaplain’s wife, she hosted hundreds of people at our home (which was the Chaplain’s house) for meals and holidays over a 30-year period. There were always people in our house, and strangers at the dinner table. That was her. She looked out for everyone – Williams College students who were feeling a bit lost, our friends from town who knew that our house could be **their** home base, or visitors to campus who needed a place to stay.

I don’t know how she found the time. But it was so important to her. She was kind, caring, compassionate, and selfless. Since she died, many of our friends have remarked as they remember her, “She was my second mother!” I didn’t understand it at the time, but this was hospitality in its fullest bloom. An open door, a warm welcome, dogs and cats to pat, food to eat, conversations to have, guidance gently offered, reassurances given, shelter provided, love extended.

She also **received** hospitality from others with the same kind of graciousness and delight. Here's an example of my mother embracing hospitality extended to her from our church.

Play Hallelujah video

She loved to sing.

My three siblings and I each had very close relationships with our mother. But they were all different. My sister and I are ten years apart and marvel at our varying perspectives of growing up in the same family. However, a constant that we all agree on is my mother's insistence on fairness – fairness about who needs new clothes, who gets to drive the family car or eat the leftovers, fairness about money spent on sports and education, and who can bring friends on family vacations. She didn't really talk about it, but just kept it all straight in her head. The upshot is that everyone felt valued, heard, respected, and had the sense that their needs were being met. That's what fairness is about, isn't it?

Josie took her bent towards hospitality and her commitment to fairness out into the community where she volunteered for A Better Chance, the Williamstown public library, the Red Cross Blood Mobile, Meals on Wheels, the Sudan Relief Task Force, and of course, the First Congregational Church of Williamstown. She made food, managed the canteen service, delivered meals, created soup mixes, and ran "Josie's Café" all in support of the missions of these charitable endeavors. She liked to help people and wanted to try to help make a difference in people's lives. Again, I don't know how she found the time.

Something very powerful motivated her. She didn't seek praise or visibility, so that wasn't it. It wasn't about her role as the Chaplain's wife – she was her own person. Honestly, I feel quite sure it was love. She loved people, animals, and nature. She conveyed that love through her smile and sparkling eyes, her attentive presence, her sincere interest in others, and her whimsical and gentle nature. She was a love. She was love.

Here's a video of us all singing together one month before she died.

Play Skinnarinky Dinky Dink video

In her final days, she wasn't worried or frightened. She spoke gently with us, told us she loved us, and sang a lot. She had a very intimate interaction with our daughter Julia, who is here today, almost as if she wanted her and the rest of the younger generation to know that everything was okay – that we would all be alright.

My mother knew some things. Maybe that's what happens when you live for ten decades. She knew that taking care of others, treating people with dignity and respect, and extending love could create unity, and ultimately peace. And of course, it did.

Peace slide

Here she is the day before she died with her warm smile, loving eyes, and her little stuffed lamb – you can see in her face that she was conveying reassurance, as she had her entire life.

I'd like to close with a favorite family prayer (maybe it was your family's favorite too).

"Oh Lord, support us all the day long until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes and the busy world is hushed and the fever of life is over and our work is done. Then, in thy mercy, grant us a safe lodging, a holy rest, and peace at the last. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Benediction

Dear God, be with us as we continue to work towards unity and peace in our community and in broader society. Help us to understand the power of offering and receiving hospitality, practicing fairness, and extending love as instruments of your spirit. We ask these things in the name of your son and our teacher, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sarah Eusden Gallop