

KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH
Sunday Worship, May 12, 2024
Rev. Irene Willis Hassan
Sermon: Joshua's Mom Guilt
Scripture: Joshua 24:14-15

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"Now, therefore, revere the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt and serve the LORD. **15** Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living, but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

Sermon: Joshua's Mom Guilt

I saw a video a few years ago where real people were called in for a fake interview for "The World's Toughest Job." The interviewer asked them if they were willing to work 24/7, no breaks, no vacations. He continues to describe the job as physically laborious and additionally demanded that the candidate for the position be proficient in culinary arts, medicine, and conflict management. Stunned, the interviewees ask how much the pay rate for the job is, and the interviewer responds that it's volunteer, no salary package included at all. The interviewer explains the position has been filled voluntarily billions of times, which solicited more gasping from the interviewees, before the interviewer reveals that the position is "Mom."

On top of the strenuous demands that motherhood has on us, any of us who are moms have probably felt what's called "mom guilt". Mom guilt is the feeling that no matter what you do it's never good enough. If I stay at home with my children, I'm not teaching them to be ambitious and independent. If I'm a working mom, I'm not spending enough time on concentrating on their important, little souls. Mom guilt keeps us up at night, wondering if we were too harsh or too lenient with our kids, if we're teaching them the right things, if we remembered all the stuff they needed for the events that they're involved with and if we're truly doing the best we can to support them.

Motherhood is difficult. What's even more difficult is that sometimes we *do* fail as mothers, or our mothers fail us. Some of us bring to this day mixed feelings as we review painful childhoods or estranged relationships with the women that were meant to protect us and somehow fell short of that duty.

So how do we deal with the enormity of the task of motherhood? How do we deal with the heartbreak that comes from motherhood not looking like we imagined? The good news is that the Bible tells us we can rely on God for everything, including and especially the hardest and most difficult tasks of our lives. Like our journeys through parenthood, these verses from Joshua 24 are placed in a time of anxiety. Joshua, the leader of the Israelites that succeeded Moses, is preparing to die. Joshua seems to be suffering some “mom guilt” himself: what if I didn’t prepare them well enough for life in this new land? What if they divert into old, unhealthy habits and idol gods? Like a mother sending her kids to young adulthood, Joshua is preparing to send the children of Israel out into the world on their own and he finds himself giving them a speech in chapter 24 about how to succeed.

“But as for me and my household, we serve the Lord,” is the culmination of Joshua’s farewell speech to them. Joshua could have given them a list of things to do like how to build irrigation systems, or ward off enemies, or form functional governments, as the keynote for the end of his leadership time (he *does* do that elsewhere in the Book of Joshua, to be fair). Instead, Joshua lists all the things that God had done to guide them out of Egypt, restore their courage and hope, and stay faithful through times of both trial and triumph.

We can and should train our children in taxes, good housekeeping, and proper work ethic. Yet, at the end of the day, life is unpredictable and we can’t control what happens to our kids when they branch out on their own, no matter how “good” or “bad” we perform as parents. Joshua felt the same way, and his answer was to orient toward God and the ultimate power and love He has to direct our lives.

At our house, we tell our kids daily that we serve the Lord and that God is smarter and stronger than everything else imaginable combined. When we fail as parents, we assure our kids that God will protect them. God will protect them where we as their parents fail, and God will protect them where our children fail themselves, God will protect them when unforeseen circumstances of life fail all of us. No matter what happens to us, God is with us the whole way.

The enormous burden of parenthood is shared by God so that we need not be alone through the sleepless nights, the anxiety, and the exhaustion. God is with us in the joys and sorrows, and He alone has the ability to guide us through the rollercoaster of life, no matter how our childhoods were. Good mothers and bad mothers alike can only nurture or damage a child with only a certain amount of power – but there’s nothing a parent can do that God can’t transform into something greater.

This, of course, doesn’t excuse us from doing our best to be good mothers to our children. God’s power doesn’t disregard abusive childhoods and poor parenting practices. Oftentimes, poor parenting – and poor decisions in general – are committed out of fear. Fear of the future, fear of reputation,

fear of losing control. When we base our decision in fear, we are not trusting in God and inviting Him to captain our families. When we trust in God and serve Him, it should empower us to be kinder, gentler, and more nurturing parents. Abusing children is a sin that God doesn't forget. Yet, more importantly, God can overcome our sins even when we fail to overcome them ourselves.

The good news of Jesus is that He's taken all of our sins, all of the "mom guilt", all of the difficulty that comes with motherhood and childhood, and absorbed that into himself. In His joy in us, we are free to find Joy in each other and our lives as parents. We should not only do our best by leaning on Him for guidance through parenthood, but lift up our sins to Him in places where we will inevitably fail. Through it all, God is with us – and that is why Joshua let go of the anxieties of his "mom guilt" at the end of his life and instead directed the children of Israel toward God as he prepared to depart from them.

Not all of us here are parents, but all of us here have been children. Our parents should do their best to align with God to eliminate their fears of this enormous task they've volunteered for in raising us. Yet, when they fail, or when the tools they've given us for a good life fail, God does not. Let us, therefore, continue to keep our eyes on God. As for our house, we serve the Lord.

Amen.