

May 9, 2010

The word nurture is derived from the Latin *nutritus*, *nutrire*, nourish, suckle. We may know the *noun*. It means training, upbringing, something that nourishes. The really sophisticated definition is "the sum of the influences modifying the expression of the genetic potentialities of an organism." This is the word, nurture. For this sermon, I am using nurture as a verb, a *transitive verb*. It means to supply with nourishment, to educate, to further the development of, to foster or encourage. There are people in our world who nurture us. Mothers' Day is a good time to pause and consider how important they are and why. This morning for a few moments I would like you to consider those people who have nurtured you, those people who have nourished you in a way that helps you grow up to be the person God desires. In identifying these people, you may thank God for them and/or you may remember how important they are and take time to thank them yourself or at least write them a letter and express your gratitude. I want to divide these people into two groups. There are those responsible for your foundation. There are also those responsible for your maturity.

You should begin with the people who truly have given you your foundation in life. This is most likely your mother and father. It may be one or both of them. It may be neither of them. For some reason, God may have needed to bring someone else in to give you a sense of rootedness in life. These people often care about you with an abiding devotion and commitment. They are the people who love you unconditionally. They provided you with some essential gifts to begin your life. In thinking about what my mother gave me, I realized she gave me herself. She showed up. She was there in the early years to help me have what I needed to feel loved and find security in a family. My father was there too, and he held a special place in my upbringing from my adolescent years on. Not everyone has the gift of two parents who have cared about their children and have had the ability to give themselves in their own unique ways. Today I am thankful I am my mother's son. We begin with those who care for us in ways no one else can. Thank God for those who give us a foundation with their care and commitment.

Another group of people who build our foundation are our friends. I heard several months ago, "We have friends for a reason, friends for a season and friends for life." Friends are a special gift from God. They help us realize life can be fun. They show up in our early years as playmates. With playmates, we develop our curiosity with life and learning and adventure and fun. Our first friends and friends later for that matter offer us acceptance. In the presence of friends who accept us, we begin to experience a connection to life and the world around us. Without friends, we are lost. Sometimes we have friends who come beside us for some special reason. They want something from us. They have something to give us. They and we draw something from each other for some reason. Sometimes we have friends that last only for a period in our lives. We wish these friends could stay with us longer, but for some reason one day they are gone. Sometimes we have friends who remain all our lives. Sometimes these are people

we would least expect. Lifelong friendships are treasures and we should see them for what they are. Thank God for those who look at life beside us as friends. They give us the gift of acceptance. They ask us of us acceptance. With acceptance, we begin to become part of the world's community.

Often friends are friends because of humor. One other part of our foundation is affected by those who help us laugh at ourselves and the world and all that would bring us down. The reason I make this a separate group is because of my Aunt Kathryn. My mother was the seventh of seven children. The sixth child in the family was a girl three years older than my mother. Kathryn happened to be one of the funniest people I have ever known. She and her husband, Ewing Parsons, lived in Roanoke. One of the forces for good in my youth was Aunt Kathryn. While my mother was serious and responsible, Kathryn laughed at those who would tie themselves in knots with life's problems. She would light up a room when she came in. She never seemed to take herself seriously. She was one of those people who made you chuckle for no reason at all. Vocationally, she was a buyer for Miller and Rhoads department store. She and my uncle had one son, Bill, who grew up and became a Lutheran minister. Spiritually, she was a lifelong Lutheran. I mention Kathryn because I believe people who help us laugh teach us how to put things in perspective sometimes perhaps better than anyone else. Thank God for those who help us to laugh.

Along with those who give us our foundation, there are those people who help us mature. I list in this group the teachers. Dot Dayton (a long time member of our church who died early this year) explained to me how important to her were her Sunday school teachers. Her Sunday school teachers gave her a faith in God. Her faith carried Dot across many years of learning, family, children, foreign service in the State Department, divorce, work, helping her children as a single parent, living life. She made me promise I would speak to Sunday school teachers about their importance. "Sometimes Sunday school teachers do not understand the power of what they are doing," she said. I told her I would share her story with you and with Sunday school teachers when I had the chance. One of these teachers wrote Dot a letter when she graduated from high school and was getting ready to go off to college in 1949. Betti Prentice passed this letter along to me; I want to read you a line or two. This is Dot Dayton's Sunday school teacher. She writes, "*Don't be afraid of faith! College changes or tends to shake a lot of our ideas. Well, just be prepared for certain 'shocks'. There are all kinds of people in the world with all sorts of ideas. Be broadminded and big, but you don't have to accept everything you hear as fact.*" (letter to Dot Dayton) Thank God for those who have cared enough to teach us about reality and what matters.

Another group that helps us mature can be considered companions. We find them in church, in work, in neighborhoods. They are not always in all those places. They turn up in the most amazing people. They were there as part of our foundation. They are there now in more mature people to help us face the discouragement and challenge of all the life is giving us. Companions are friends who are comrades. Life sometimes becomes

battle. A true companion is a person of substance not always because they think deeply or possess some philosophy. Their status as companion is there because of a friendship as a result of some conviction or experience that ties us together. Companions often help us with balance. They enable us to keep life steady and moving forward. Thank God for companions who help us move on with all that matters.

Finally, there are those people we love and who love us. These are the people we hope will see us through to the end. If parents or those who act as parents give us foundations, those we love and who love us will be with us as we get older. I cannot say a lot about these we love. They come in many different forms and people. We love our families and we love those God has given us to be family. Thank God today for those we love.

When Jesus spoke to his disciples in John 14, he mentioned the work of the Holy Spirit. We may thank God for all who nourish us with their humor and wisdom and acceptance and love. We may thank God for them because they offer us the wisdom of God's Spirit. If they do not teach us what we need to hear, they make us receptive to it. It is people God sends our way who help us understand the life of faith and what God has to give us. How often is it that we return home or we get back to somebody and we say, "I don't have a clue what the minister was saying today; someone help me." And someone you eat with says, "It was simple. He was explaining how important we are to one another and when we realize that the Spirit of God is working." You are amazed and you smile. Today we are thanking God for them because often people show up in our lives who help us take seriously the Word himself. The Savior of the world is speaking to us through this gospel and through this church. People who understand us, who care about us are the ones who help us apply these words to our lives. We thank God today for all who help us believe and live our lives in Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Lord God, Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, we thank you and praise you for all the people You bring our way to enable us to live life to the fullest. We thank you for our mothers and for those who have been mother to us. We are grateful for all who love us unconditionally, for those who are our friends, for those who teach us about you and about the world we live in. We thank you for those who make us laugh, for those who sit beside us this morning. We thank you for those we love and those who love us. Lord, enable us to be a people filled with your peace. Keep us from letting our hearts be weighed down. Help us not be afraid with all that seems ahead of us. Fill us with your peace, not the peace of this world, but a peace that is faithful and alive, a peace that passes understanding. Let us hear and believe and receive the Word, Jesus Christ. Let us hear him and take him and what he says to heart. It is in his name that we pray, Our Father who art in heaven...**

Works cited

Letter to Dot Dayton from Horty, Charlottesville, VA, June, 1949.

*nurture*, Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition, Merriam-Webster Incorporated, Springfield, Massachusetts, 1994, page 799.