

Abiding in Love, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. x5090510
1 John 4:7-21 and John 15:1-8
Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 10 May, 2009

This is Mother's Day, the day selected by Anna Jarvis and president Woodrow Wilson as the day when we all recognize and honor our mothers. It's a day when we try to visit mom or have her over to dinner, and it's especially nice when folks join their moms to worship in church.

Amy Dickinson published a letter relating to Mother's Day in her column entitled "Ask Amy" in Tuesday's *Burlington Times-News*. Ms Dickinson is a wise woman, and I appreciate her thoughtful answers to readers' queries.

"Dear Amy: Last Mother's Day, my daughter was a new mother of a 2-month-old baby. Instead of asking me to lunch or something along that line, she got upset that I didn't ask her out to celebrate her new motherhood. I had sent her a card. Instead of spending time with me, she went out for the day with her father, which hurt me a lot. My question is: Am I wrong? Should I be celebrating her motherhood?" Signed, "Mother in Denver"¹

"Dear Denver: Although Mother's Day seems to have morphed into a free for all celebration of all things Mom, in my view, the day should be one where we daughters (and sons) honor and celebrate our own mothers— and not a day where we expect our mothers to celebrate our parental status."²

It seems to me that both mother and daughter were a bit misguided. Each wanted to be the center of attention, and I don't think that's what parenthood is about. Parenthood is about loving, and loving is giving— not receiving.

John's community had definite ideas about love that they based on their memories and experiences with Jesus. For them, Jesus' life and ministry revealed the nature of God's love. God loved us by sending "his only Son into the world so that we might live through him."³ Jesus gave up his life for others. That is love. Jesus is our example of how to live in love. It is being willing to let the other live at the expense of the self.

There is little wonder that our culture has such misconceptions of love. Too many descriptions of love in the media have to do with elevated heart rates and hormone levels. They have to do with what we call "making love," and jumping in bed. Too much focus is placed on our physiological responses to an attractive person. Don't get me wrong, I enjoy those things myself, but they are not love.

Love is about focusing on the needs of the other, not about my fluttering heart. Love is more about decision than about feeling. Love is not about being the center of attention. It is about giving attention to others. It is knowing the pain of sacrifice so that others can survive and thrive.

Good parenting reflects God's love. I say that, because I've seen plenty of examples of bad parenting. Bad parenting is reflected in the young lady who said she wanted to have a baby so that she'd have someone to love her. She had no idea of what was in store. A baby has no capacity to give love. It only has needs— needs for nourishment, needs for sleep, and needs for protection and warmth. That baby will learn to give love when it has received love.

Bad parenting is pushing children to compete and succeed based on the parent's expectations,

¹*Burlington, NC Times-News* May 5, 2009, page A6

²Ibid.

³1 John 4:9

and not on the individuality of the child, or worse, in the parent's living vicariously through the child.

Parental love is most recognizable at the three a.m. feeding time, when the mother comforts and nourishes a baby, or, better yet, when the father goes to the crib, changes the diaper, and brings the baby to the mother to be fed. Good parenting is best shown through teamwork. It is difficult, indeed, to show love to a child when the parents do not exhibit love for each other.

We love, because God first loved us.⁴ It's difficult to love others if we do not feel loved ourselves. If you don't believe that God loves you, it will be a real strain to try to love someone else. It is difficult, not impossible, but it is difficult, to be a good parent if one did not receive love and nurturing as a child.

Parental love is also expressed in saying the word "no" to the child. Good parents will teach their children that they are not the center of the universe. Our culture is currently paying big penalties for a few generations of children who were taught they should have all of their desires met and that the only thing that counts is their happiness. This is echoed in the misdeeds of preachers who have taught their parishioners to believe that Jesus died for them so they can get to heaven. They have raised nominal Christians who expect the church to do for them, rather than living lives of love and sacrifice for others.

I've witnessed a young mother who feels she's inadequate as a mother. She has an older child who used to receive all of the love and attention of the parents. A new child has come into the family and become the focus of much of the parents' attention. The older child acts out. It has to learn that the parents' reduced attention is not absence of love. The parents are doing a good job. They care about and love both children, but sometimes can't give all of the attention desired. Yes, God loved us first, but sometimes God's answer to us is "no." And, sometimes the branch that doesn't bear fruit gets pruned.

Both Mother in Denver, who wrote to Amy Dickinson in the newspaper column, and Denver's daughter, need to work on their relationship. The birth of a baby, a grandchild, should be the beginning point of celebrating parenthood. I would think that mother and daughter would be drawn together by a shared experience. It should be a commonality around which the deepest of feelings can be expressed. It should be the beginning of understanding the sacrifices made by parents, and of expressions of gratitude for what our parents have done.

"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God."⁵

⁴1 John 4:19

⁵1 John 4:7