

## Wesley United Methodist Church

May 13, 2018

“God’s Original Seatbelt.”

John 13:31-38

I am sure that many of you remember what it used to be like to drive a car before power steering? Before automatic transmission? Before air conditioning? Before seat belts?

Let’s stop here for a moment. Before seat belts, parents could pack eight kids into a family car, ages one week to 18 years, with no restraining thoughts or devices. Automobile safety is much more regulated than it used to be. Today we have laws requiring children under four years and forty pounds to be buckled into some sort of child car seat. You can’t even bring your newborn home from the hospital until they make sure a rear-facing child car seat is in your car. From two to five years old children, they should be in a forward-facing seat. For slightly older kids there are booster seats restrained with a shoulder harness. With the mandatory installation of airbags, no kids under the age of 12 are supposed to be allowed in the front seat at all for fear of the force of the exploding air bag causing them more injury than any crash.

Before all these mechanical safety devices, however, some of you no doubt grew up with a different kind of child-restraint system. I am sure you have seen the card that pictured a mother driving a car, her son in the passenger seat and her outstretched arm protectively flung across his chest. I’ve heard a great deal from our daughters about my overprotective tendencies, but I think that this card tells all.

A mom’s protective reach has always been the saving seat belt for her family. But this seat belt takes different forms in different families.

For some, mom offered the seat belt of continuous presence. At the door when they trudged off to school. Welcoming them back when they flew in the door. Putting every meal on the table. Shouting encouragement at every game.

For some, mom offered the seat belt of role model. As a mom who always worked incredibly hard at her job, her church, her family. As a mom who put everything she had into all the things she did, regardless how important, or how trivial.

For some, mom offered the seatbelt of stability. Especially when there were new schools, new homes, new challenges. A “no fear” mom raising “no fear” kids.

For some, mom offered a seat belt of gentleness. A spirit of love, forgiveness, tenderness, always accessible, always welcoming. Whether mom was a “Rock of Gibraltar” type or a “Balm in Gilead” type, she helped create who you are and how you respond to the world.

Mother’s Day beats poor Father’s Day by a longshot. Hallmark estimates that 150 million Mother’s Day cards will be sent this year, but only 95 million Father’s Day cards, making Mother’s Day the third largest greeting card holiday of the year. U.S. Americans spend an average of \$105 on Mother’s Day gifts, \$90 on Father’s Day gifts. The phone rings more often on Mother’s day than on Father’s day. The busiest day of the year at carwashes? The Saturday before Mother’s Day. What mom thinks still matters. We do like to think of Mother’s Day as “Mom’s day off.” Usually this takes the form of dining out for one of the three meals. Making her breakfast in bed. Maybe doing some of the more unpleasant chores that have remained undone.

But Mother’s Day was never intended to be a day off from any of the tasks and triumphs that go along with mothering. The story of Mother’s Day is a story of protective yet adventurous, gentle yet bold love that was passed from generation to generation.

How did it start? The mother church of Mother’s Day is in Grafton, West Virginia, where for the first time on May 8, 1908, Mrs. Ann M. Jarvis was honored by her daughter, Ms. Anna Maria Jarvis.

Ann was 12 when her father (Josiah W. Reeves) was appointed to a Methodist church in Philippi, WV. Seven years later she married Granville E. Jarvis, son of the Baptist minister in Philippi. They had seven children in Taylor County, W.V., where Mrs. Jarvis organized and conducted “mother’s work clubs” in Philippi, Webster, Prunytown, Fetterman, and Grafton.

These mother’s groups were work clubs started to mobilize the mothers of a community to fight the problems of disease, poor health, improper sanitation, one or more of which had killed five of her seven children. When the Civil War erupted, the Methodist churches in many of these villages were taken over by Union troops with soldiers from Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. When an epidemic of typhoid fever and measles broke out among the soldiers, the general asked if these mother’s clubs wouldn’t help care for the sick. They did and received the highest commendations for their wartime service.

When the war was over, and blue and gray veterans returned to the same communities, the same churches and in many cases the same families, there was a bracing for the feuds and prejudice and hatred that would continue on a local level. Mrs. Jarvis had an idea whereby her “mother’s work clubs” could be reactivated and redeployed to “kick the devil downstairs” as a phrase of the day put it.

So she worked with local county authorities to announce the formation of a new celebration in 1868 called Mother’s Friendship Day. The plot was simple: each member of the club would bring her entire family and mix that family throughout the crowd. This way there could be no splitting of the community into hostile camps.

On the appointed day a huge crowd gathered. What everyone feared most started to happen: armed Blues and armed Grays occupied opposite corners and glared at one another. The authorities decided to disband the crowd and cancel the event, but Mrs. Jarvis would have none of it: “I will not. I’m no coward.”

When the program was announced to start, Mrs. Jarvis appeared dressed in Union colors alongside a counterpart dressed in Confederate colors.

When the bugler called the crowd to attention, Mrs. Jarvis explained the meaning of Mother’s Friendship Day, and invited the crowd to sing “Way Down South in Dixie” to the accompaniment of the Prunytown band on the high courthouse porch.

A portion of the crowd loved it and sang its hearts out.

When they were finished with this song, Mrs. Jarvis’ Confederate partner invited the crowd to join her and the band singing “The Star-Spangled Banner.

At the close of singing this song, two teenage girls, one dressed in blue, the other in grey, stepped forward, took the two ladies’ hands, and invited them to shake and hug each other. The crowd was then invited to do the same. What followed was a melting of hearts, and the bloodshed that everyone feared was prevented.

Mrs. Jarvis continued her work with the “mother’s work clubs” and Mother’s Friendship Days throughout the rest of her life. She moved to Grafton, WV in 1864, her husband died in 1902, and she was moved to Philadelphia to be with her son, where she died in 1905.

At the foot of the open grave in West Chester, Penn. Mrs. Jarvis’ daughter, Miss Anna M. Jarvis, made a pledge that she would establish a memorial to Mother’s Friendship Day, and for the next two years waged a round-the-clock campaign to found a Memorial Mother’s Day. On May 10, 1908, a full Mother’s Day service was conducted at Andrew Methodist Church in Grafton, WV and in the afternoon at Wanamaker’s Auditorium in Philadelphia. Not until 1912 did the Methodist Episcopal Church General Conference agree to designate the second Sunday in May as Mother’s Day. In 1914, President Woodrow Wilson signed a resolution confirming and setting aside the second Sunday in May as Mother’s Day.

Ann Jarvis used “mother love” to spread Jesus’ love commandment from the “Boys in Blue” to “Johnny Reb.” Jesus commanded all his disciples to do a simple, a monumental thing—to love one another “as I have loved you.” It was this seatbelt love that would enable others, enable “everyone,” to recognize Jesus’ disciples when they saw them.

All right, maybe for ALL of us this is an impossible order! But Jesus made a way. When we participate in Christ’s death and resurrection in baptism we invite Christ to be born into our soul. The risen Christ within us fills us with love that is as Jesus himself loved us.

Christ-love is the seat belt on our spirit. The gentle binding on our heart and soul that lets us venture into dangerous territory, unknown challenges, unfriendly circumstances without losing our love. The greatest love we can express is the love we have experienced and are commanded by Jesus.