

May 8, 2016

Mother's Day 2016  
*My Greatest Regrets*  
John 19:25-27

**Opening words:** You know the story. I have told you about the birth of the modern American Mother's Day in the past. It all began with the death of Anna Reese Jarvis in 1908. Her daughter, Anna M. Jarvis, didn't want her to be forgotten, so she campaigned for the creation of an official Mother's Day. She dreamed of having a day when all mothers would be honored. She began by petitioning the superintendent of the St. Andrew's Methodist Church in Grafton, West Virginia. Her mother had spent over twenty years there teaching Sunday School. Her request was granted and the first Mother's Day celebration was held on May 10, 1908. Four hundred and seven people attended. Anna Jarvis arranged for white carnations — her mother's favorite flower — to adorn the patrons. Two carnations were given to every mother in attendance. The idea grew fast. By 1909, forty-six different states were observing Mother's Day. In 1912, West Virginia became the first state to officially observe Mother's Day. In 1914, Woodrow Wilson signed into law the national observance of Mother's Day. There is not a single person in this room that didn't have a mother. How often have you thought of her today?

On this Mother's Day, we are instructed from the Gospel of John. It was written by John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Written approximately 85 A.D., his understanding of Jewish lifestyle and outlook are clear. Some say it was written to appeal to a Greek audience. Others say, it was written to correct the synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. Everyone agrees, it is the "Spiritual Gospel." It summarizes Jesus' earthly ministry. Our reading for today comes from the very end of that ministry. As a matter of fact, Jesus is on the cross. Our scripture reading for today is John 19:25-27. Let me call this message *My Greatest Regrets*. Let me say this before I begin. This message was written about mothers, but it can apply to any relationship in your life.

**John 19:25-27** Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. <sup>26</sup> When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," <sup>27</sup> and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

-----  
Abraham Lincoln once said, "*All that I am, or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother.*" I wish I would have uttered those words first. That is my story too. If you find your story in that quote, say, "**Amen!**"

My father died in 1996. That meant for the first time in over forty-five years, my mother was alone. My sisters and I did the best we could to fill his void, but we failed. She

struggled without him. She was the perfect straight man for his routine. We tried many things to fill her empty, lonely days. Annually, she would travel to Colorado Springs to visit my sister, Janet. Janet did a great job of hosting her. My job was simple. I took her to the airport and picked her up a week or two later.

I do not remember the year. However, I do remember the weather. My mother was returning from one of her Colorado trips and I went to Pittsburgh Airport to pick her up. It was a long trip there and back because the weather was so bad. I am sure it was the heaviest snow of the year. I crawled to the airport, and drove slower on the way to Warren. The hour was late when I drove into her driveway. Before I escorted her inside, I unlocked the front door, turned the lights on and carried in her suitcase. She looked at me and said, "Russell, you look tired. The weather is so bad. Why don't you spend the night? I will cook you a nice breakfast in the morning." My response to her kind invitation has haunted me for years. I said, "No. I have some things to do in the morning." Can I be honest with you? I can't remember what I had to do the next morning. Chances are it wasn't that important. The truth is, I just wanted to go home and I did. I left my mother alone in that cold dark house because I was selfish. My mother sacrificed so much for me, and I couldn't sacrifice a little for her. I am ashamed of my behavior and that night still haunts me. It is one of my life's greatest regrets. I wish I could make it up to her now, but it is too late.

I would like to say that was my only regret, but I can't. I have many, but I only have time to talk about three today. I don't believe my regrets are unique. They may be your regrets too. Arthur Miller once said, *"Maybe all we can do is hope to end up with the right regrets."* For those of us whose mother has passed it is too late. For those of you who still have your mother, they are a warning. Don't wait until it is too late. I hope you learn from my mistakes. If you are ready to begin, say, **"Amen!"**

### **More Questions**

My first regret is not asking more questions. Listen to what I am about to say. I know basic facts about my mother. Her name was Ruth. She was the older of two daughters born to Walter and Nina Milligan of Brooklyn, New York. She went to P.S. 92 during her grade school years and graduated from Erasmus Hall High School. During the Second World War, she went to Pratt Institute and studied dietetics. After graduation, she moved to Jersey City, New Jersey and worked in a hospital. She worked during the day and began studying towards her Master's Degree at night. One night the work and the studies were placed to the side. She attended a social gathering at the Marble Collegiate Church. The Second World War had just ended, and dances were held so returning soldiers could meet single women. She met a young dark-haired man named Ronald from Ohio. At first, she wasn't interested in him because she thought he was Catholic. She was suddenly interested in him when she found out he was Protestant. In time, they married and moved to a magical place called Warren, Ohio, where everyone is a little smarter and better looking. In time, they would have three children; I am the

youngest. I know basic facts about her life but I wish I knew more. My mother is gone now. I regret not asking her more questions.

I wish I would have asked her more family questions. Was Aunt Sarah Grandma's older or younger sister? Was Uncle Lester Grandpa's older or younger brother? Where are Grandma and Grandpa buried? I wish I had asked her more personal questions. Did you ever consider staying in New York? Did Grandma ever forgive you for moving away? At what age did Grandpa start smoking? What was her favorite color? I am seven years younger than my sisters. Was I an accident, or just a disaster? Did you ever wish I was a girl? I have a million questions I would love to ask her now, but it is too late. Am I the only one, or are there questions you never asked? I regret not asking my mother more questions. If you will admit you regret not asking more questions, then say, "**Amen!**"

### **More Secure**

I regret not being more secure. Webster defines security as "a firmly established relationship or reputation". Tomorrow, I will celebrate my 59<sup>th</sup> birthday. To be honest with you, I like the fact that I am going to be 59; it is a cool age. I am glad I do not have to be young again. Being my age is very liberating. When you are young, you have so much to prove. You always have to prove you are the smartest. You always have to prove you are the strongest. You always have to prove you are the fastest. You have to prove you are going to be the most successful. When you get to my age, you discover none of those things really matter. I will be the first one to admit I am not the smartest, strongest, fastest or the most successful. It is not that those things don't matter. All I am saying is, I don't care. I really don't care what you think about me. The only thing that really matters is that I like myself. Do you like yourself? In other words, are you secure?

I regret not being more secure when my mother was still with us. One of the reasons children struggle with their parents is insecurity. The younger generation is always trying to prove something to the older generation. My mother loved me unconditionally, but I was always trying to win her respect by proving my self-worth. That is why there is always an edge between parents and children. Our mothers know too much about us. They know our weaknesses that we are always trying to hide. I regret not being more secure, because I would have had a better relationship with her. I know something now I didn't know on the day she passed. She loved me unconditionally. There was nothing to prove. If you regret not being more secure with your mother, say, "**Amen!**"

### **More Articulate**

I regret not being more articulate. It was early spring in 2002. My mother was in a rapid state of decline. As a matter of fact, I sat near her deathbed. She was sleeping comfortably. My father died six years earlier and she was dying of a broken heart. My sister, Susan, and I did what we could. We were taking turns sitting with her so she would not be alone. It was my turn, and I sat in the shadows of her room at Crandall Medical Center at Copeland Oaks. The hour grew late and once again I began to think

of everything that had to happen the next day. In the silence of that room I decided to leave. I did something for the first time. I said something for the first time. I leaned over my mother and kissed her and I said to her, "I love you." From some unknown power she opened her eyes and responded, "I hope so. I am your mother!" I am ashamed to admit, that was the first and the last time I said those three important words, "I love you". I regret not being more articulate. If you regret not being more articulate with your mother, say, "**Amen!**" If you still have your mother, then find the courage to tell her. I have never met a mother who got tired of hearing that they were loved.

This all takes us to our scripture lesson for today. We find ourselves today in the nineteenth chapter of John. It is extremely late in Jesus' earthly ministry. The last person Jesus healed has been healed. The last lesson he taught is completed. The disciples have even observed their last Seder with Jesus. Jesus has been arrested and tried. There is only one thing left for Jesus to do: die. Hanging between two criminals, Jesus is running out of time. The crowd of Palm Sunday had disappeared and the only ones who remained were those who truly loved him. The list is small. On that small list was his mother, Mary. It must have been a painful day for her. Time moves so fast. Thirty-three years earlier she had brought him into the world; now she was watching him leave. She longed for Joseph's strength, but he was gone. Jesus sees his mother and does the responsible thing. He entrusts her to John, the author of this Gospel. Jesus waited until the last moment, but he didn't wait too long. He died without a single regret.

I hope you don't wait too long. This is Mother's Day and it is a good day to ask all your questions. There is no such thing as a foolish question. This is a good day to become more secure and relate to her. You don't have to prove anything to your mother; she loves you unconditionally. This is a good day to become more articulate and tell her how you really feel. Mothers never get tired of hearing that they are loved. Abraham Lincoln said it for us all, "*All that I am, or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"