

Ray Robinson was born in Albany, Georgia on September 23rd, 1930. He died in 2004. You may not recognize the name of Ray Robinson. That is because he is most commonly known by his first and middle name. Ray Robinson's middle name is Charles. Ray Charles Robinson went by the name of Ray Charles.

Ray Charles, as many of us know, was a singer and piano player. He crossed over into various musical genres and became friends with and recorded music with various artists ranging from Louis Armstrong and Frank Sinatra to George Jones and Hank Williams, Jr. What I always admired about Ray Charles was his passion and his upbeat attitude. Whenever Charles was interviewed or when he sang you always got a sense that he loved to perform for others. He loved sharing his musical talents.

Of course, Ray Charles was blind. Ray Charles became blind when he was about 5 years old from glaucoma. We are going to watch a clip from Ray Charles' early life. Ray Charles was born into poverty and his blindness and his race led to some incredible challenges. Let's watch how his mother dealt with Ray when he faced a particular challenge early in his life.

Watch clip of movie "Ray" in which he is a boy who must pick himself up from the floor and find his way around a room.

Ray Charles actually had two mothers growing up. One was his biological mother and one was the second wife of his father. He referred to one as Mama and the other one as mother. I share this to say that both of these women, his mama and his mother, had a hand in raising Ray. He did not see his father very much so these two women, his two mothers, were pivotal in teaching him how to handle the challenges that his unique situation would bring to him.

I have to admit that in the scene which we watched I do not know if the woman in the scene is his biological mother or his step-mother. I have not watched the movie yet outside of this clip. But I am glad that I don't know which mother is in this scene. I am glad that I don't know because the love and care that this woman shows in this scene is not dependant on whether or not she birthed this boy.

The love in this scene is not an image which you will see depicted on a Mother's Day card. "Thank you mother on this Mothers Day for ignoring my cries when I fell down." No, love does not mean hugs and kisses all of the time. Showing love can mean doing what may seem mean in order to do what is best for the other person.

I share this scene today because I think that today's two passages give a definition of love which may be different than the romanticized image we have for Mother's Day. If you are on the church email list you know that I struggle with Mother's Day. Mother's Day is a day to celebrate the gifts of our Mother's.

We celebrate the mothers who raised us and the ways they tended to our needs. I understand that more phone calls are made on Mother's Day than any other day of the year. Many women will be taken out to dinner today by thankful children and spouses.

But it would be pastorally insensitive if we celebrate Mother's Day without bringing attention to the people who suffer on this day. The family who is mourning after the death of their mother this year. The many women who want to become biological mothers but their bodies and life situations are working against their desires.

The women who raised their children but now feel estranged from those children and have regrets about maybe some of the ways they handled situations with their children. We make Mother's Day out to be this great and wondrous day and for many of us that is the case. I am thankful that later today I will be able to visit with my mother and father. But this is also a day which is difficult for many.

So that brings us back to the two scriptures which we read today which I think are marvelous texts to read on Mother's Day. That is because these texts tell us that if we want to grow in our relationship with God we need to practice three actions. Have faith. Have love. And follow God's rules. Faith, love, and following the rules. On this Mother's Day we celebrate faith, love, and rules.

Every morning when I get myself dressed I put on a cross. I do not wear it outside of my clothes. I wear it inside my clothes so that I can feel it against my chest. I wear this cross not to make a statement to anyone else. I wear this cross to remind myself to place my trust in God today. To have faith that God will deliver what I need for the day.

And there are days when I don't feel it. There are days when I feel left alone by God. But I put on this cross as my prayer to God to say, "I am trusting you today." According to John, we begin by having faith.

After faith we are told by John to have love. According to John in both of these passages, love is about how we treat other people. It doesn't matter if someone is part of your biological family. It does not matter if you birthed someone or raised them. To be obedient to God means to love others. So the love we celebrate on this day is the love that anyone is called to express to others regardless of their family connection.

How do we show love to others? I am going to give a shout out to Alison Rios. Alison is going to be setting up chairs for the benefit concert on Saturday. Alison told me that the reason that she is setting up chairs on Saturday is as a mother's day gift to Katrin. That is what I think it means to express love to another.

And the third action that John lifts up in both of these readings is to follow the commandments. Follow the rules. How many mothers have said those words to their children or how many of us have heard that said to us? There is a time to challenge rules but here John says that we are to seek to follow God's rules. And those rules are to basically love God and love your neighbor.

Today I am thankful to be in a church that is celebrating the gifts of all women. It does not matter if they are mothers or not. It doesn't matter the quality of the parenting of the ones who are mothers. Today we celebrate the gifts that women bring and how that reflects God's love to all of us.

When I sent out the email about suggestions and guidance for worship today one of you suggested that we worship outside in the midst of "Mother Nature." So we are going to follow that advice and for the last song we will process outside where we will be in the midst of Mother Nature and plant 3 flowers to celebrate the gifts of all women.

Faith, love, and obedience. Three actions which we are called to live out on this day. AMEN.

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Text: John 15:9-17 and I John 5:1-6

Given: May 10, 2015 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)

Prayers of the People: from the blog “Time Warp Wife”

To those who gave birth this year to their first child—we celebrate with you

To those who lost a child this year – we mourn with you

To those who are in the trenches with little ones every day and wear the badge of food stains – we appreciate you

To those who experienced loss through miscarriage, failed adoptions, or running away—we mourn with you

To those who walk the hard path of infertility, fraught with pokes, prods, tears, and disappointment – we walk with you. Forgive us when we say foolish things. We don’t mean to make this harder than it is.

To those who are foster moms, mentor moms, and spiritual moms – we need you

To those who have warm and close relationships with your children – we celebrate with you

To those who have disappointment, heart ache, and distance with your children – we sit with you

To those who lost their mothers this year – we grieve with you

To those who experienced abuse at the hands of your own mother – we acknowledge your experience

To those who lived through driving tests, medical tests, and the overall testing of motherhood – we are better for having you in our midst

To those who are single and long to be married and mothering your own children – we mourn that life has not turned out the way you longed for it to be

To those who step-parent – we walk with you on these complex paths

To those who envisioned lavishing love on grandchildren -yet that dream is not to be, we grieve with you

To those who will have emptier nests in the upcoming year – we grieve and rejoice with you

To those who placed children up for adoption — we commend you for your selflessness and remember how you hold that child in your heart

And to those who are pregnant with new life, both expected and surprising –we anticipate with you

This Mother’s Day, we walk with you. Mothering is not for the faint of heart and we have real warriors in our midst. We remember you.