

PAUL'S BORN-AGAIN OTHER MOTHER

Romans 16: 13 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Tuesday night, I was awakened and thinking about Mother's Day, and what I should preach on today. I knew that Patty Rich had gone Home to Jesus, and I knew that she was a mother to so many daughters—though not by birth. She became a mother to Stephanie, then to Rex's two daughters Danielle and Ashley, then Rex and Patty adopted Sarah Ruth Rich to raise from the day she was born. I know from Kim Klein that Patty was a second mother to Alyssa, Grace, Rose, and Elana, and since Patty went Home to Jesus at 5 PM on May 4th, I have heard others who have said Patty was a mother to them, teaching them so much, spending hours teaching them to sew. As I was awakened in the night, I knew from the Holy Spirit, I knew today my sermon would be about Paul's born-again other-mother. When Kim called Alyssa about Patty's passing and Alyssa with Grace, Rose, and Elana, all went to Powell for the funeral yesterday, Alyssa told her Mom, "Patty was my other mother." Many of you can think of your other mother or mothers, in addition to your birth mother or adopted mother, who encouraged you, and prayed for you and was spiritually influential in your life. She inspired you to persevere, she accepted you, she understood you, she believed in you, and she helped you to believe in yourself? Who comes to mind? God has ordained other mothers whom He uses in all our lives. These other mothers adopt us, or we adopt them, for God's purpose and glory in our lives—these special other mothers.

Some of you women may be wondering, "Am I being an "other" mother like the mother of Rufus was to the apostle Paul? Have you been a mother to a neighbor child, to a friend of your children, to a troubled child you feel called to, have you been tutoring a student in your home, have you been mothering a niece or nephew or grandchild? Not every woman is allowed by God to be a birth mother or a foster mother or an adoptive mother, but every woman can be an "other mother." Ashley Montague once wisely said, "The next best thing to being a mother is to behave like one." That's what "other" mothers do. If dad is the head of the family, moms must be seen as the heart of the home. Aren't you glad for the privilege of honoring mothers on "Mother's Day"?! I am! While we only have one birth mother, or one adopted mother, and no one should compete with her place in our hearts, this morning I want to recognize "other mothers," some special ladies who have had a godly impact in our lives who are not our mothers by birth or adoption, but who have influenced our lives physically, emotionally, and spiritually!

Before turning to our text and preaching on Paul's born-again "other mother," I want to share something I found this week called the Mommy Test. A mother reported this conversation, and I quote, "I was out walking with my 4-year-old daughter. She picked up something off the ground and started to put it in her mouth. I took the item away from her and asked her not to do that. "Why?" my daughter asked. "Because it's been lying outside; you don't know where it's been. It's dirty and probably has germs," I replied. At this point, my daughter looked at me with total admiration and asked, "Wow! Mommy, how do you know all this stuff?" "Uh," I was thinking quickly. Then I said, "All moms know this stuff. It's

on the Mommy Test. You have to know it, or they don't let you be a Mommy.” We walked along in silence for 2 or 3 minutes, but she was evidently pondering this new information. Finally, my daughter processed it all, and she beamed, “OH...I get it, Mommy! So, if you don't pass the test, you have to be the daddy?”

Let's turn to our text. Paul was finishing up the final greetings of His Mt. Everest Epistle of Romans. In the greetings to the church at Rome and from himself and his team of missionaries, there are 39 people mentioned. In the middle of the greetings to the church at Rome in Romans 16: 13, we read our text, “Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also, his mother, who has been a mother to me as well.” This is quite a curious passage that begs us to research what Paul just said. At the least, this greeting was intended by Paul as a very warm, personal, and respectful recognition of a precious, gracious, loving Christian woman who had treated him as a son, had aided him, and encouraged him in his marvelous work of apostleship. At some point in Paul's ministry, this mother of Rufus, became the mother of Paul also. There is a story behind this one verse. There has-to be! Paul had some personal reasons for remembering this woman with great admiration and endearment. This morning, I want to examine all the Scripture has to say about other mothers, to help point us to Paul's story behind this verse, so we may come to learn about this lovely lady, whose name is not given us, but who became Paul's “other mother.” There are at least five biblical facts that begin to give us possible insight into the person and the place this other mother had in Paul's life, and the place God has for all “other mothers,” who serve him all over this world. First,

GOD ORDAINED A PURPOSE AND A PLACE FOR OTHER MOTHERS AND IT WAS SEALED IN JESUS' BLOOD AT CALVARY'S CROSS. (I.)

Turn to a scene John reported as he stood at the foot of the cross along with a number-of women, who were Jesus' followers, including Jesus' earthly mother, Mary. By virgin birth, Mary bore the Son of God, who was also the Son of Man. The aged Simeon, just before he died, was given the privilege of holding the baby Jesus in his arms as Mary and Jesus' stepfather, Joseph, came to Jerusalem for the purification rites for Mary and for baby Jesus, 40 days after Jesus was born, and the sacrifice was to be a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. Simeon came in the Spirit as the Holy Spirit had promised him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Simeon knew this young couple were carrying Messiah, the Christ-child. We read the saga, in Luke 2: 29-35. “Lord, now you are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation that You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to Your people Israel.” And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed, (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

That day of Jesus' crucifixion was the day when a sword pierced Mary's soul. Joseph must have died some years before. Jesus, until the age of 30 when He began

His earthly ministry, He took the job of being the man of the house for Mary and her large family of four other sons and at least two daughters. Mary, the virgin mother of Jesus, thus had at least seven sons and two daughters, Jesus, by virgin birth and by Joseph, Mark 6: 3 reports, Mary had four sons, James, Joses, Judas, and Simon, and there were daughters, so that means at least there were two, though there could have been many more daughters. The family was a large family. At Calvary, Mary's virgin born Son of God/Son of Man was dying for the sins of the world, including her sins, yours, and mine. As Jesus was dying, something special happened. Listen to John 19: 25-27. "But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother and His mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home." As Jesus hung dying on the cross, in His anguish, He thought of his earthly mother, and made provision for her. This was a sacred charge to John. From that very hour, John provided for Mary, taking her under his roof and taking responsibility for her in every way. Jesus' half-brothers were yet unbelievers— John 7: 5 states, "For not even His brothers believed in Him." But Jesus' mother was given a charge too, to be John's other mother, "Woman, behold your son." Jesus at the cross inaugurated the importance of "other mothers." Secondly,

GOD ORDAINED THAT WE SHOULD LOOK UPON OLDER WOMEN AS MOTHERS. (II.)

Turn with me to I Timothy 5: 1-2, and you will see in the words of Paul, the foundation of a "Pure Life" ministry for all men. In the face of the addictive plague of pornography, that is destroying Christian men and all men the world over, Paul commanded Timothy and all of us, saying, "Do not rebuke an older man, but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, in all purity." The New Living Bible translates I Timothy 5: 2 in language we cannot miss. "Treat the older women as you would your mother, and treat the younger women with all purity as your own sisters." Paul goes further teaching God's call on older women to be "other mothers," in Titus 2: 4-5, saying, "These older women must train the younger women to love their husbands, and their children, to live wisely, and be pure, to take care of their homes, to do good, and to be submissive to their husbands. Then they will not bring shame on the Word of God." Thirdly,

GOD ORDAINED FOR OTHER MOTHERS TO BE THE REWARD OF ALL THOSE WHO FORSAKE ALL FOR THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. (III.)

Look at Jesus' words in Mark 10: 29-30. "Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or **mother** or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now, in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and **mothers** and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life." Is not this mother of Rufus for the apostle Paul the mother Paul needed after he became a Christian? There is good reason to believe Paul's family disowned him. Paul referred to himself as of the tiny little tribe of Benjamin, a "Hebrew of the Hebrews," Paul also mentioned that

he had suffered the “loss” of many things for the Lord’s sake (Phil. 3:5-8). When Paul became a Christian, it is possible that his own parents rejected him, and that he was adopted by the mother of Rufus. The total absence in Paul's writings of any mention of his parents, and the known custom of the Jews of holding a funeral for apostates from Judaism, funerals for the living dead, in their view, Paul was doubtless, bereft of his parents, never to be mentioned in their domestic circle again. When Paul was converted to Christ, there is also the problem of Paul's wife. The fact that Paul was once married seems to be the case from his implied membership in the Sanhedrin (Acts 23: 1-10), if he was married, did his wife leave him as if he were a dead man for trusting Jesus? The fact that Rufus’ mother became a mother also to Paul is because the Bible declares in Philippians 4: 19, we read, “And my God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” Other mothers are a need God supplies, and a reward God gives to those who forsake all for the Gospel. There is one exception to Paul’s whole family seeming to desert him. In Acts 23: 16-22, we read of the son of Paul’s sister, his nephew uncovering an ambush in Jerusalem to spare his life. We don’t think of Paul as having relationship needs, but God knew Paul needed a mother, and God supplied that earthly need for him. Fourthly,

GOD ORDAINED THAT OTHER MOTHERS WILL BE SUPPLIED TO US THROUGH SOME OF THE STRANGEST PROVIDENCES IMAGINABLE.

(IV.) Look again at our text in Romans 16: 13. “Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also, his mother, who has been a mother to me as well. Does this reference in the Bible make you wish you knew more? Does this glimpse of this intriguing episode make you curious about “the rest of the story”? Turn with me to Mark 15: 16-22. Listen as I read it to you. Here is a North African man from Cyrene who stumbled into the spotlight of history, it would seem, quite by accident, but in the providence of God, who planned it all, Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus, had his whole life transformed as a result, as he helped Jesus carry His cross up to the hill Golgotha. Now know Mark disappeared for a while from the Gospel record after having left Paul on his first missionary journey, but he showed up later in 62 AD in Rome with Paul when Paul wrote Colossians 4:10 and Philemon 24 and spoke of Mark as a fellow worker, and a few years later, Paul sent his last epistle of II Timothy to him to ask for John Mark to be with him before he was beheaded.

Mark’s Gospel was primarily directed toward Christian Jews in Rome. One example is in Mark 12: 42, that in describing a poor widow’s temple gift, Mark says that two mites or two copper coins, make a penny, literally a farthing, which is the Greek transliteration of the Roman or Latin quadrans. Mark was deciphering the value of two mites to accommodate Roman readers. Since, Mark was writing for a Roman audience, and Rufus was a prominent Christian in Rome, there was good reason to mention this brother’s name in connection with his father’s role at the crucifixion—speaking of Simon of Cyrene, the North African being the father of Alexander and Rufus. If, this “Rufus,” mentioned in Romans 16; 13, is the same “Rufus” of Mark 15:21, and most historians and commentators say it appears to be so, Simon of Cyrene came to Christ as being one of the first converts to Jesus—along with the believing thief on the cross, and the centurion when Jesus cried “It is finished!” and commended His spirit to His Father. Simon probably had died,

since no greeting is extended to him. Alexander may have been deceased as well, or was living elsewhere, or it is possible, but not probable, he was not a Christian. We do not know these details. Yet, between the event of Saul's conversion, and sometime between Paul's conversion and the writing of Romans, 20+ years later, written from Corinth, this woman, the mother of Rufus, in some way, "mothered" the apostle Paul. Where did it happen? Under what circumstances? We don't know. It was not in Rome, for when the apostle Paul penned his epistle of Romans to the saints in Rome, Romans 1: 10 tells us he had not yet visited Rome.

Put the pieces together. This spiritual mother, somewhere along Paul's three missionary journeys, may have had a room in her home for Paul, like a prophet's chamber, and a warm bed for a weary apostle. She may have learned his favorite meals. Before Saul of Tarsus arrived in Antioch, Luke in Acts 11: 25-26 tells us Barnabas took him from his native city, Tarsus, and brought him to Antioch where Christ followers were first called Christians. Guess who was one of the prophets and teachers in the Antioch church. It was Barnabas, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, now Saul to become Paul, and Acts 13: 1 adds Simon or Simeon called Niger—this Simon they called Simon, the "Black." When Paul arrived in this new city, no wife, no family, and away from home, in this critical, and personally painful time in his life, was it then that Simon and his wife, parents of Alexander and Rufus, took Saul? Was that when the mother of Rufus took him under her wing, showed maternal tenderness to him, provided Paul with a "home away from home?" Does that explain why Paul remembered her in Romans 16 with godly fondness as the mother of Rufus who "became a mother to me.?" Fifthly, and lastly,

GOD ORDAINED PAUL'S OTHER MOTHER WOULD GO UNNAMED SO THAT MILLIONS OF OTHER MOTHERS COULD JOIN HER. (V.)

Notice Romans 16: 13 that the only name for Paul's other mother was Rufus' mother. This verse shows us being a mother is more than giving birth to children, important as that is, but it is also the tender, loving care that only a woman can give. Rufus' mother's name is unknown, but her love is unforgettable. How can this woman who had such a deep impact on the apostle Paul remain nameless? We don't know her name. For some divine reason, God the Holy Spirit allowed this other mother with a name not to have her name recorded in the Bible. We use the noun mother when we think of Mother's Day, but Paul's use of the word appears to be as a verb—literally, Rufus' mother mothered me also. Mothers don't mother for the sake of recognition, but they mother behind the scenes. God sees mothers and other mothers, all you do for Him and others, and no mothering is insignificant to Him. Your mothering is unforgettable. Did Simon's wife lovingly apply ointment to Paul's bloody back (2 Cor. 11:24-25; Gal. 6:17)? When his brow was furrowed with anxiety for all the churches under his care (2 Cor. 11:28), did she offer words of encouragement as a loving mother would do for a son? When Paul's own brothers in Christ treated Paul ill, did the apostle's other mother remind him many, like her, who loved him and appreciated his sacrifices for the Master's sake? Before Rufus and his mom moved to Rome, did Paul officially adopt her as his own mother. I started counting my other mothers over these 76 years of mine—there are over 20. Let me close with the testimony of Pastor Wayne Jackson from Jackson, Tennessee. Spend time today remembering all you other mothers! HMD!