

FIXER UPPER: II – GOOD BONES!
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Festival of the Christian Home/Mother's Day

Proverbs 31:10-31

Luke 2:22-32

Every episode of the HGTV show “Fixer Upper” begins with the husband and wife team of Chip and Joanna Gaines showing prospective buyers three properties from which to choose. All of them are run-down houses – some badly in need of repair and some not-so-bad. Every once in a while, they’ll come to a house, look around at its disheveled appearance, but then make the following comment: “It’s got good bones.”

It took me a while to figure out what they were talking about, but eventually I came to understand that it meant that, though the house was worn in many places, there were still some things there that were good and solid from the original dwelling. But still not being sure I knew exactly what the phrase meant, I did what any sensible person would do – I googled it! I googled the question, “What does it mean when someone says a place has good bones?”

And here’s what I found out. To quote: “At its broadest, ‘good bones’ generally means an older home or apartment has covetable, time-tested features that most everyone agrees are positives. Appraiser Jonathan Miller says that “Good bones refers to a property that retains a lot of the character of the original period but needs updating. Hardwood floors, stairways, crown moldings, fireplaces, door and window frames that can be updated or restored keeping the original design elements intact when considered collectively could be applied to a property as having ‘good bones.’” (On-line, “What Do People Really Mean When They Say a Place Has ‘Good Bones?’”)

So to translate it into Karen Bunnell language, and for the purposes of this sermon, good bones are things that make a structure lasting and enduring and of value.

Today, as we celebrate the Festival of the Christian Home across the United Methodist Church, as well as Mother’s Day, of course, I want to take the concept of “good bones” and think about families – our families collectively, and this family that is our church. What is it that makes families strong and enduring and of value? What are the “good bones” that make for strong families? And what does scripture tell us about it?

Well, the two scriptures we read this morning tell us a lot about it – the scriptures of a virtuous mother and her family, and the story of Jesus’ family and family of faith.

We learn from both of these scriptures (and, I might add, the children's book) a lot about the good bones of strong families.

So this morning for a few moments, I want to suggest a number of things that make families strong and the first thing is this: how they love each other, care for each other, and respect each other. We surely see that throughout that beautiful passage from Proverbs, in the loving and dedicated way that woman cares for her family, and how they love and care for her in return, as evidenced by the last lines – “Her children rise up and call her blessed, her husband also, and he praises her . . .”

It's hard to break the bonds of a family whose members love each other, and care for each other, and respect each other. You can tell they do that when you're around them, by the way they speak to each other and help each other out and have each other's backs.

You could see the strength of Jesus' family throughout his life, especially in the way he loved and cared for and respected his mother. From beginning to end, he watched over her, and at the end of his life, when he knew he would no longer be there to care for her physically, he made sure someone else would step up to the plate and do it for him – his disciple John. He took care of that as one of his last words from the cross.

A family has good bones when they love and care for each other and respect each other. But oh, how easily those things can go away if we're not careful. I'll never forget watching an episode of “Everybody Loves Raymond” when Ray and Deborah realized they were being more polite to people outside of their home than they were in their own family. Too often we take the people closest to us for granted, and even speak to them in ways we would never speak to someone else in public.

The good bones of family life only stay strong if we're committed to them. Love, respect, care only stay strong if we are committed to them. It's like caring for your body – little things matter. In the same vein, little things mean a lot when it comes to strengthening family bonds – listening to each other instead of having your head in your smartphone or tablet, remembering birthdays, anniversaries and oh yes, Mother's Day, going to school concerts and sporting events to cheer on family members, eating meals together – well, you get the idea. Families only stay strong and develop good bones when they work on it. Oh, but when they do, it is wonderful.

A second thing I want to suggest is that families have good bones and are strong when they have standards by which they live. I know I talk about old TV shows too much, but I have to tell you, shows like “Leave It to Beaver” and “The Andy Griffith Show” and others harken to a time when children did chores for their allowance, and they spoke with respect to adults, and they learned how to behave in public – in other words, they had standards and if members of the family did not live up to those standards, there was accountability.

I read a story this week that made crystal clear the importance of standards in a family and otherwise. It was told by Tony Campolo and in it he shared that after Mahatma Gandhi died, his son took over his work for peace and justice in the world. That work took him and his family to South Africa to fight apartheid.

Gandhi's grandson Arun, told Tony Campolo, about something that happened one day between he and his father. He said, "My father asked me to drop off the automobile at the repair garage and then be back at five o'clock to pick him up. So, I dropped my father off for his meeting and got the car to the garage by one. Since it was a long time until five o'clock, I figured I could go to the movies, which I did. That day there was a double feature being shown, and when I got out I checked my watch and realized it was past five o'clock!"

"I rushed to the corner where my father had said he would be waiting for me, and when I saw him there, standing in the rain, I tried to think of excuses I could make. I rushed up to him and said, 'Father, you must forgive me. It is taking them longer to repair the automobile than I thought it would take, but if you wait here I will go and get the car. It should be ready by now.'"

He said, "My father bowed his head and looked downward. He stood for a long moment and then he said, 'When you were not here at our meeting time I called the garage to see why you were late. They told me that the automobile was ready at three o'clock! Now I have to give some thought as to how I have failed, so as to have a son who would lie to his own father. I will have to think about this. So I am going to walk home and use the time during my walk to meditate on this question.'"

Arun Gandhi said, "I followed my elderly father home that rainy, misty night, watching him stagger along the muddy road. I rode behind him with the headlights of the car flashing ahead of his steps. As I watched him stumbling toward home, I beat on the steering wheel and said over and over, 'I will never lie again! I will never lie again! I will never lie again!'"

After hearing that story, Campolo wrote, "It is obvious that this was a way of correcting a child that did not involve punishing the child directly, but showed the child how much hurt a parent feels when a child does what is wrong." (Tony Campolo, *Let Me Tell You a Story*, p. 147)

And I would add this – it's not just children doing wrong, but any member of a family doing wrong, not upholding standards. Families are strong, families have good bones when they have high standards and strive daily to uphold them.

Finally, and most important of all, families have good bones and are strong when they practice their faith actively. Consider the Gospel lesson – at a very young age, Jesus' parents took him to the temple to present him to the Lord. They started him on

the right course, for we learn further along in scripture, how he loved being in the temple and engaging in conversations about God's Word.

His parents were people of faith, and introduced him to a life of faith. I was at a meeting this week where I was reminded once again that children and youth who grow up in faithful families, where the families actively attend to their faith and seek to grow in their faith, though they may stray at some point, has far better a chance of being a faithful Christian adult than those who have no adults living faithfully in their lives. It's not enough for children to hear their parents say they believe in God – what really matters is for them to see them actively work at their faith – through prayer and devotion, attending worship and studies, using the gifts God has given them in outreach and service, praying with them over meals at their table and at their bedside at night.

In a few moments we'll be giving thanks to those who have taught Sunday School this year – think of the message they're giving their children and others by doing that – that faith is so important they want to help others grow in it. And think of all of the children and youth in our Sunday School program who watch their parents go and study in their own class, instead of dropping them off and going elsewhere. What it says is that faith matters – and when all members of the family are working at growing in the love and knowledge of Jesus Christ – that makes for a strong family with good bones.

I want to finish by reminding you that what I have said this morning about strong families does not just mean families together because of birth or marriage, but also about families like ours – church families. We are strong, our Elkton United Methodist Church family is strong and has good bones, I believe, because we do love and care for each other, and respect each other; we do try to maintain high standards for how we live; and we are committed to our faith.

And I daresay we do it, not because we have to, but because we know that it's life the way God meant it to be – hand in hand with others, hand in hand with the world, and hand in hand with Him. On this day, the Festival of the Christian Home, let us do all we can, at home, here, and in the world to build those strong bones and be the families God created us to be! May it be so!

Amen.