



**Sermons from St. Marks
United Church of Christ
New Albany, Indiana**



Mothers, Dragons, and Monsters of All Sorts

Text: Revelation 12:1-6

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Mother's Day

The Book of Revelation has this unique and interesting story of a woman giving birth, with a dragon observing. The dragon, in the story, is a horrible beast with great power, waiting to devour this child—a child who is to be the ruler of God's Kingdom.

The child, of course, is snatched away and taken to God to be protected.

And the mother flees into the wilderness in order to be safe.

Scholars debate this passage. The dragon is usually perceived to be Satan, but it's the mother who vexes people.

Some scholars say that the mother is the Christian Church, and the baby is the Word of God and the devil wants to snatch God's Word away.

Other scholars say that the mother is Mary, and this is a re-creation of the birth of Jesus Christ.

Whichever the case, the story symbolizes something very true. Mothers, Dragons, and Monsters of All Sorts are always present in life. Whenever parents bring children into the world, they bring that child into the presence of lots of stuff, not all of it being very good. . It's a mean and cruel world we deal with. The world is filled with deadly traps waiting for anyone. The care and nurturing of a generation of young people is about the most important and critical job there is.

A prominent attorney who was rather full of himself met a stay at home mother at a function, and asked her what she did, in something of a smirking fashion.

The woman replied, "I am socializing two homo-sapiens in the dominant values of the Judeo-Christian tradition in order that they might be instruments for the transformation of the social order into the teleologically prescribed utopia inherent in the eschaton." Then she added, "And what do YOU do?" The lawyer stammered: "Er, I'm just a lawyer."

Every year, at this time, I think that most parents, both moms and dads, reflect on parenthood and all that goes with it.

About 23 years ago a sermon I might preach on being a parent would be:

The Secrets of Being a Good Parent.

A couple years after that it might have evolved into:

Some Helpful Suggestions for Parents.

Giving it a few more years it would have become:

Some Potentially Helpful Ideas if the Conditions are Right.

Now it would probably be:

Pray to God and Hope for the Best.

I jest. A little.

One thing that every parent knows is that the only real parenting experts are the people who have never raised children.

Today, reflecting on all of these things, I came upon two gifts we can pass on to our children.

The first gift is the gift of maybe.

When I was growing up I hated the word 'maybe.'

Can I go to the movies with my friends tomorrow? Maybe.

Can I get a new bike? Maybe.

I hated the word maybe until I learned the virtue of the word maybe.

Maybe requires time and communication.

Can I go to the movies with my friends? Yes. End of discussion.

Can I get a new bike? No. End of discussion.

Maybe requires further thought and further discussion. It isn't so much the answer to the question that becomes important, but the journey to the answer. Maybe is such a great word.

The second gift is the gift of being able to say, 'I don't know.'

Years ago I heard M. Scott Peck give a lecture. Peck was the author of the famous bestseller, *The Road Less Traveled*, as well as numerous others. One of the things he told us was about his adolescence. Peck was a student at Exeter Academy in New England.

Exeter is a very prestigious, influential school. Most of the graduates of the school go to Ivy League colleges. Exeter is big time stuff, and like his older brother, Peck was there as a student.

And he hated it. He was terribly miserable and hated Exeter.

He went to the kindly dean of students and spoke to him of his unhappiness at Exeter. The dean looked at him and said, "Young man, are you out of your mind, everyone wants to be at Exeter. You're not allowed to be unhappy here."

Peck was unsatisfied, so he went to the President of the school who cut him off mid sentence and said, "Young man, are you out of your mind, everyone wants to be at Exeter."

Finally Peck talked to his Math teacher. His Math teacher was something of a cold fish, but brilliant. Rumor had it that he was the most brilliant man on the school faculty.

Peck figured that if he went to the most brilliant man on the faculty, this man would know.

So Peck sat down with the man and told him his woes. The Math teacher sat very quietly and listened to every word that Scott Peck, all of 15, had to say. Finally, when it was done, the teacher took his glasses off and said, "I don't know. I just don't know what to tell you."

Peck said that this was the best thing he had heard. He figured that is the smartest man on the faculty didn't know the answer, but he didn't feel so bad about himself.

Sometimes the words, "I don't know," are almost holy.

Sometimes in dealing with your own children, or any young people, I find that when they seek out our advice, our wisdom, if you will, they aren't so much having to seek our 'answer' but they want to see how we process what they ask.

When they come up to us and ask, "What should I do with the rest of my life?" they aren't so much seeking a quick answer, but they are engaging us in the conversation.

Peck said that this teacher's "I don't know" meant, to him, that this man took him seriously and took him seriously enough to enter his youthful confusion. As I said, at times, saying, "I don't know" is almost a holy thing. It's a great gift, like the gift of maybe.

Finally, one of the greatest things parents and adults can pass on to a young generation is

the gift of faith.

A friend of mine had a delightful story about this in his church newsletter. A first grade teacher was teaching her class that sometimes people believe in make-believe things and that God was a make-believe thing. She spoke to one of the children:

Teacher: Tommy, do you see the tree outside?
Tommy: Yes.
Teacher: Do you see the grass outside?
Tommy: Yes.
Teacher: Go outside and look up and see if you see the sky.
Tommy: Okay. (He departs for a while and returns) Yes, I did see the sky.
Teacher: Did you see God?
Tommy: No.
Teacher: That's my point. We can't see God because he isn't there. He doesn't exist.
God is make-believe.

A little girl in the class spoke up and said that she wanted to ask Tommy some questions. The teacher, who was very confident in herself, agreed. The little girl asked Tommy:

Little girl: Tommy, do you see the grass outside.
Tommy: Yesssss. (He was getting tired of these questions.)
Little girl: Did you see the sky?
Tommy: Yessss.
Little girl: Tommy, do you see the teacher?
Tommy: Yes.
Little girl: Do you see her brain?
Tommy: No.
Little girl: Then, according to what she's teaching us today, she must not have a brain.

Faith is the ability to believe in things we cannot see, hear, taste, touch, or smell. One of the greatest gifts we can pass on to young people is the gift of faith.

Motherhood, as it always has, lives in the presence dragons and monsters of all sorts. Parenting is not a sure a certain thing, but an adventure. When we embrace the great gifts of maybe, I don't know, and faith, we begin to prepare ourselves for this journey.