

**“A WOMAN OF GOD IS TO BE PRAISED.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Text for the Sermon: Proverbs 31:28-31**

I heard recently about a new Survivor reality TV show.

“Six married men will be dropped on an island with 1 car and 4 kids each, for 6 weeks. Each kid plays two sports and either takes music or dance classes. There is no access to fast food.

Each man must take care of his 4 kids, keep his assigned house clean, correct all homework, complete science projects, cook, and do laundry.

The men must wear makeup daily, which they must apply themselves, either while driving or while making four lunches. They must attend weekly PTA meetings; clean up after their sick children at 3:00 a.m., and get a 4-year-old to eat a serving of peas.

The kids vote them off the island, based on their performance. The last man to win gets to play the game over and over again for the next 18-25 years...eventually earning the right to be called ‘Mother’” (Mikey’s Funnies).

I want to bless and encourage the women of First CRC this morning. It is Mother’s Day and my thought will certainly apply to all mothers, but I want to give this word to all the women here, mothers, grandmothers, wives, single moms, single women.

First CRC is blessed among churches to have many godly women and Scripture is clear, women who love and fear the Lord are to be honored and praised even in public.

Our text is a familiar one and a common Mother’s Day text. **Proverbs 31:28-31.**

**It is an acrostic poem in praise of mothers.**

Our text comes at the end of an acrostic poem, sort of like the poem MOTHER.

People write acrostics to praise things. Remember last Sunday’s text from Psalm 119, an acrostic poem written in praise of Scripture. This one is in praise of women who fear God.

The author puts together a string of pearls in praise of the woman who fears the Lord. He lists 22 praiseworthy things about her each beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

He starts at verse 10 with “An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels” (ESV).

A godly woman is a gift to all who know her. She is rare and to be praised and blessed. No treasure on earth can compare to her. But why is she so rare? Several possible reasons come to mind. One reason may be that such a woman is rarely sought after. Another reason may be that such a woman is rarely appreciated, praised and encouraged.

**Verses 28-29** certainly speak to that. “Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.”

Of all the things in all the earth that a woman can be given, is there anything better than the praise of her husband or children or of those whom she serves? What could bring greater earthly happiness?

A godly woman is a rare gift, a precious gift, a true gem. Such a gift must be praised. In fact, the last verse of this poem, verse 31, gives the first and only imperative or command in the whole poem.

### **The three parts of our praise.**

“Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.”

What she means to her household, and to her church and community, is worthy of public praise.

**So husbands, fathers, and men of First CRC here is how we are to praise. There are three parts to our praise that we are called to do.**

First, we express thankfulness to God for blessing us with godly mothers and wives, and in this congregation, with godly sisters in Christ. It’s all grace, don’t you know. A godly, God fearing woman is a creation of God. He is to be thanked and praised.

Second, we are to show kindness and respect to her. You can’t do that too much for a godly woman. What is rare and valuable should be treated that way. You don’t put diamond rings in the tool box out in the garage. Show honor and esteem in words and actions.

Third, we are to speak well of her wherever we are. In fact, take every opportunity to praise her.

Is it vain or proud to do that? No, it is part of love, we praise what we love. No sports team should get more praise than our wife or mother or the women of this flock. What God praises we ought to praise (compare Romans 2:29) and God absolutely delights in women who are devoted to Him and love Him and fear Him with a godly reverence.

**Praise is our debt of honor. It is the fruit of her labor.**

It is what she is due, it is the fruit of all she is and has done.

C.S. Lewis in his wonderful little book on the Psalms, gives the powerful insight that praise is not merely the expression of joy, it is the consummation of joy. "Praise not only expresses but completes the enjoyment" (*Reflections on the Psalms*, p. 95). We praise what we love. It is not only natural, it actually completes our love. It makes it full when we praise. Love and joy are not complete until they find expression.

Men, young and old, let us rise up and honor the godly women among us with the praise they deserve. Let praise be constantly on our lips.

***Why do I say constantly?*** Because women in America are told every day that they are ugly or that they are only sex objects or that they fall short or don't measure up to some New York or Hollywood standard. Our world is full of lies about what a woman is or should be and what beauty is. Women are told that aspiring to be a wife and mother is settling for too little and selling yourself short. And unfortunately some Christian men help propagate these lies.

Shows like Bachelor and Bachelorette make a mockery of what is truly beautiful and what is lasting and what produces happiness; of what is important in men and women and in relationships.

So we must constantly counter the lies with praise for what's true. Phama would tell me in the earlier years of our marriage when I told her she was beautiful inside and out, that she felt like I had to say that and that it wasn't really true. I had to overcome years of being told otherwise to begin to convince her that the beauty shining through from the inside was making her more beautiful on the outside. So I just kept telling her, constantly.

I praise God for my wife and for her fear of the Lord and her love for God and His Word which she has put in her heart. I praise her for her huge love for this flock and her prayers for us.

I praise her for her unwavering support of me and my calling and my ministry here and for how little she complains about my schedule and hours and my absence on so many evenings for meetings and on Saturdays to prepare sermons.

She has seen me at my best and at my worst. She knows my sins, faults and weaknesses, yet she is undaunted in her love and support. She bears my heartaches and shares my joys.

I praise her for the sacrifice of bearing, birthing and caring for five sons, and the toll that has had on her; for the countless loads of laundry, piles of dishes, diapers and discipline; for hours of reading and listening and for her thoughtful, special prayers for her sons.

I praise her for her purity, her modesty, her humility, her freedom from the fear of man and for her wisdom in giving godly counsel.

I am blessed among men and have been shown the kindness of God. and my praise extends to the many godly women in this church, both young and old. I praise God for you.

**Verse 30** takes us deeper into this idea of true beauty and why it should be praised.

“Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”

The poet has created a contrast here I want us to see, and the flowers here this morning help illustrate it.

### **A beautiful cut bouquet and a beautiful live plant.**

Both are flowers, both are beautiful, both are real, both are authentic. But there is a big difference isn't there? This bouquet is beautiful, but it will only last for a season. Its beauty will fade and die. Why? They have been cut off from their roots, from any means of sustaining life.

This Azalea plant has a beauty that will last and when these flower petals fall off there will be new buds, new life. It will bloom again.

These are the two dimensions of a woman's beauty. There is the external and the internal. The contrast in Proverbs is between what is deceptive and what is genuine.

The word “charm” is used to suggest a lie or what is false. The word “beauty” is used to suggest what is vain. Together they warn that physical beauty may be created with cosmetics, jewelry and clothing and there can be something beautiful, but it won't last.

But there is a true beauty that is lasting. The true mark of human beauty is the beauty of love for God and devotion to the Lord. The good news is that this real beauty is not up to fate or chance or good genes or surgery or cosmetics. It is available for every woman who loves and fears the Lord. It is within reach for every woman.

This beauty is a gift. That means it comes from an external source. True beauty is from God. The Holy Spirit is the botanist. The Holy Spirit is the nourishment, the nutrient, the Miracle Grow.

Phama loves to plant bushes and flowers. She tells me what she wants and where she wants it. She tells me she wants a hole twice as big around and twice as deep as the plant size requires. She wants to put in good soil, soil that breathes. She wants to make room for the roots to grow, to create a healthy environment, give the plants a good start. You see the important part is unseen, internal and underground at the root level.

If you want a beautiful, flourishing life it's a good idea to make some space around yourself to grow, to push back the hardness and harshness of the world that wants to press you into its mold. Dig out and push back the rocky soil and thorns and thistles.

God created you to bloom. He created you to flourish in His love and grace, by His Holy Spirit. He created you for His glory and to reflect His glory.

Men, our praise is part of the process, part of encouraging this new beauty. Our praise strengthens her hand. There are millions of temptations to fear the opinions of others rather than fear God, or to fear rejection by others more than fear God; temptations to turn to externals, to things that look good but are empty and fleeting.

We encourage each other when we recognize the worth of what's *internal, eternal*, what belongs to the soul. We all flourish with praise.

The fear of the Lord is the crown of a woman's beauty, character. It's her greatest virtue, her greatest asset. It's what makes her of far greater worth than rubies and far more rare. It's what gives her strength and dignity.

A home's well-being and a church's well-being and a community's well-being and a society's well-being depend on women who grasp the powerful significance of their inward beauty and strength rooted in their love and devotion for their creator and God. These are the ones who influence a culture and a generation that is desperate for something real, something authentic, something rooted, not flashy, plastic, fake.

God has shown us the greatness of His love by sending into our world, and into our individual worlds, mothers, grandmothers, wives, sisters, daughters, godly women who show us everyday God's beauty and grace in loving, caring, sacrificing ways.

It is not only right, it is necessary for us to rise up and bless them and praise them publicly, and not just once a year. Let her praises be on our lips constantly. In this God is glorified and the women in our midst are built up and encouraged.

### **A word to our mothers.**

Today you will receive all manner of gifts, flowers, chocolate, cards, lunch out, a nap, but whatever it is it will be fleeting.

Here is your lasting gift for today. No matter how you feel about yourself. No matter how much guilt you have, no matter how crabby you have been or short with your husband or children. No matter how much time you have wasted watching TV or how much you have overeaten or overspent or fallen short of your own ideas or your mother's ideas of a good mother. No matter how many times you lost it or yelled or said the wrong thing or didn't know what to say. No matter how many times you didn't have time or take time or said later but later

never came. No matter how many times you made a mountain out of a mole hill. No matter how much you would like a do-over so maybe you could do better.

If you will cast yourself on the mercy of Jesus and put all your hope in Him and trust yourself and your family to God, His grace is sufficient. What every mother needs more than anything else is grace, grace that covers the fears and the faults, grace that covers the sins and the guilt, grace that covers the regrets and what ifs, grace that says you don't have to be perfect or meet someone else's standard, grace that says God loves you more than you do and loves your family more than you do and He has it all in hand.

God's grace is God's Mother's Day gift to you on this Mother's Day. With this gift you can truly rejoice and be glad and thankful and rest in Him.

“Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”