

Time Capsule May 11, 2008

It's Mother's Day 2008, and as usual, this is a rather difficult day. That's because every one of us here has had a mother, but we have not all have similar experiences with our mothers. Some of us have been closely connected with Mom, and wind up being more like her than we ever imagined possible. Some of us may have had a mother who embodies complete unconditional love, and in her eyes, we could do nothing wrong, while others of us had/have mothers who can't find one good thing about anything we do.

Some of our moms were more absent than present, either because of their own busy lives, or because of life circumstances, or perhaps due to eroding mental or physical health. Our memories may be the warm and fuzzy variety, or they could be ones that cause us to shudder. Having a mother, or being a mother, or both, can be situations that are both joyful and painful, fun-filled as well as stress-filled. It's really a catch-22, and that's why Mother's Day is really a tough one—we all come from so many different places and experiences when it comes to the whole parenting thing that it's really hard to know which way to go or what to do.

Anne Lamott, in her book *Grace (Eventually)*, has a way of illustrating the dilemma around motherhood through her own experiences. She wrote, "When my mother was alive, I felt like strangling her about half the time." She said that she loved her mother in many ways, but at the same time found her impossible to deal with a lot of the time. When her mother's finances began to run out, and she got sick with Alzheimer's, Anne took care of her, and became a mother to her mother—circumstances that aren't totally unfamiliar to many of us.

When Lamott wrote *Grace (Eventually)*, her mother had been dead some three years, and she found herself still in the throes of trying to figure out that relationship, saying that mothers have a way of exhausting their kids with worry, and it's hard for everyone in the process. However, she also realized how much she missed her mother. She missed how great it felt to make her mother laugh. She missed that her mother loved her rebellious nature, and she was very aware of the stories that she would have loved. Anne realized that she was finally able to get past was how much she missed having a healthier, more elegant mother, and how she was now at the point of missing her.

Lamott said that upon arriving home the other day, her son Sam came out of his room to greet her. He was on the phone, and Anne heard him say, "My Mom's home. I gotta' go bond." Anne Lamott wrote, "That's how I feel more and more about my mother; that she's home finally, and I gotta' go bond."

It seems to me that this bonding experience is really a life-long thing for many of us. Sometimes it happens in the course of living our lives, and sometimes it happens long after physical life has ended, but I really believe it's something with which we eventually come to terms.

Maybe a time capsule is a tool that might help us in that process. One that is carefully put together could actually help piece together an image of the person and time that had been previously unknown or misconstrued. It might be helpful in telling us more in retrospect than we could ever have understood in real time.

Now I've never actually put together a time capsule, yet I'm aware that there are all different kinds of things people put in them to tell future generations about their lives and the significant events that occurred in them. I've heard of folks putting newspapers, and things like photographs, diaries, genealogies, books, music or artwork—anything that in one way or another captures the essence of what the life and times of its creator was like. Other items that might evoke those memories were things like ticket stubs from a special event, memorabilia from a Super Bowl, a Harry Potter book, even favorite family recipes.

I suppose all those things really help the finder to understand more about the person who created it, and in that regard, fills the bill for what a time capsule is supposed to be. However, when I think about parenting, and the influence our parents have on us, it seems to me that it may not be so much of a time capsule, as a *timeless* capsule. There's a very real sense in which our families do have a timeless impact on us, and that, to me, seems more valuable than any of the items we might put in a time capsule.

What would we include in a timeless capsule? What are the thoughts, feelings and values that have a timeless quality to them that we would want others to know?

I asked a couple of friends about this, and they had some ideas of what they would want to have in their timeless capsule. One said that she would want to share hope—hope that the world would change in such a way that things would really be green for future generations. Another said that she would want to share some of the wisdom she'd gained over the years. I really liked that idea, because it seems to me that wisdom has a timeless quality to it. For instance, Alice Walker, author of *The Color Purple*, wrote about some wisdom her mother had handed down when she said: "My mother had handed down respect for the possibilities—and the will to grasp them." That's a great piece of wisdom for us all to hold onto! idbit of wisdom that can guide us in ways to live together better.

I think if I were to try to include wisdom in my timeless capsule, I would want to be sure to say things like: "People are all different; it's best to just accept them as they are." I'd probably also encourage those who open my timeless capsule to be willing to take risks—to travel to new places, to try new things. That's

a way to overcome our fears, and to live life more fully. I think another piece of wisdom I'd add would have to do with realizing that we never stop learning. It doesn't stop when we finish school; it really only begins as we experience more of life and find more questions than answers.

There's another thing I'd want to put in my timeless capsule, but I'm not exactly sure how to do it. That "thing" is the importance of having faith—certainly faith in a God who's larger than any of us, faith in a God who loves us completely and who is always in our corner cheering us on. I'd also want to include the importance of having faith in ourselves—knowing that we're OK people who have gifts and abilities that are God-given. I don't quite know how to put those things in my capsule, but maybe it has something to do with the saying, "**Faith runs in the family.**" I guess I'd have to come up with something that would be an intangible addition in the timeless capsule.

Then there's one other thing I would certainly want to include, if I could figure out how, and that's the timeless quality of love. Someone told me about a bumper sticker she had seen that said, "**When the power of love is greater than the love of power, we will have peace.**" Wow! That's a good one, in my mind!

Love is the most powerful force in the world; it can bring the strong to their knees; it can give hope to the hopeless, and strength to the weak. Love—total, complete, unconditional, unending, no string attached kind of love can totally transform our lives. Love that is freely given doesn't hold back, and it never ends.

Probably the best way to share a sense of what that kind of love is is found in Paul's writing in I Corinthians 13, where he says, "**Love is patient and kind. It is not jealous or conceited or proud; love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth. Love never gives up, and its faith, hope, and patience never fail...Faith, Hope, Love, these three, but the greatest of these is love.**" (I Cor 13:4-7 TEV)

That, for sure, is something I would want our daughter to know—that the love I have for her will never ever die. Hopefully, that love has set her free to be herself, to live her own life, and to know with confidence that her mother's love is only a hint of the kind of love God has for us. I don't even know if that's something that can be fully expressed in our timeless capsule, but I certainly want to try.

Closing:

Our "official" Bible passage for today is from the writer to the people in Thessaloniki, and to me, it is a good summary of the kind of timeless message we might want to pass on. It reads like this:

"We took you just as you were. We were never patronizing, never condescending, but we cared for you the way a mother cares for her children. We loved you dearly, not content just to pass on the Message, we wanted to give you our hearts. And we did."

I don't know exactly how to put a heart in a timeless capsule, but that's something we need to figure out.

Have a great Mother's Day, and go in peace.
Amen.