



Sometimes, the mothers among us have a better understanding of that opening verse of the Gospel passage we heard this morning, especially when it's translated a different way: "I've loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love." And we need not look further than a certain mother who embodied those very words, who died on this day three years ago. Her name was Delphine Gibson, and the only reason why her story was made known beyond her own family was that, at the time, she was the oldest living American at 114 years of age. In fact, she died just three months short of turning 115. She attributed her century-plus of living to good food, yes, but also her faith and her church. And yet, there were plenty of moments throughout her life that would truly test whether or not anyone in her shoes would want to stick it out in God's love when so much went absolutely wrong.

Delphine was born in 1903 in Ridgeway, South Carolina, about 20 miles north of Columbia. She was the second of eight children with parents who were sharecroppers. No matter how much Delphine tried to help on the farm, suffice it to say poverty and outright-racism dominated her younger years in the south. Eventually, she moved to central Pennsylvania, with her husband, Taylor, to find work in the area's now-historic brickyards. She would give birth to three children, outliving two of them, not to mention her husband died all the way back in 1980. What made matters worse is that two years after her beloved Taylor's death, she contracted glaucoma, and suffered from complete blindness. Soon enough, much of her hearing faded away as well. Nevertheless, Delphine did her best to help others feel welcomed in love with her family and beyond. And through all those difficult circumstances, she firmly believed Jesus was saying to her all along, "I [have] loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make [yourself] at home in my love."

So, when Delphine celebrated her 114<sup>th</sup> birthday with her son and state officials from Pennsylvania, her fellow nursing home residents, and her home church members of Mount Hope Missionary Baptist Church, even if she could not see or barely hear, they gave her flowers for her to still smell the sense of hope and beauty and new life that was still meant for her regardless of her age. But then Delphine really came to life when her Baptist siblings in Christ started singing, and she boldly joined in, too. Evidently, with her senses fading, she still felt the most beautiful home of God's love in Jesus Christ, and she could not help but continue sharing that Great News with all the people gathered there that special day. That it, evidently, was not about her being the oldest American at the time. Instead, throughout all her 100-plus years, with a fair share of struggles along the way, to say the least, it was always about God who made a home for all of us in our Risen Lord.

However, we in the church realize this holiday is not easy for everyone. Some of us miss seeing the woman we call mom in the home we cherished. Some of us never knew who she was. Some were not close with their mother at all. Some face immense difficulty trying to become one in having their own children. This day is not easy for everyone, to put it mildly, but God insists on setting up a home in our hearts not just to house pleasant and happy feelings, but for the times in our life where there are struggles and pains and fears of will it ever improve for us. Through it all, God insists, "I [have] loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love."

Sometimes, mothers have a way of revealing such boundless hospitality of heartfelt comfort and overwhelming grace. Sometimes, there are other women in our life who more than fulfill that important role, so that we may know the words are just as true for us now as ever before. Evidently, one of Delphine's favorite hymns she craved to sing even after losing her husband, and two of her children, not to mention her sight, and her hearing gradually fading as well; nevertheless, she still belted out "Amazing Grace," as if to remind her fellow nursing home residents and the people who worked there: that no matter our physical or spiritual condition, God has already unleashed the most wonderful hospitality of all, by letting Jesus loose into our hearts, and better yet, to make a grace-filled promise to never ever let that most beautiful Messiah go from within us. So, we give thanks for all the faithful women who helped us hear the Greatest News of all: "Make yourselves at home in [God's] love," that love to last a lifetime and for all eternity. Thanks be to God, indeed! Amen.