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Proverbs 31:28, ESV

²⁸ *Her children rise up and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her.*

Proverbs 30:17, NLT

¹⁷ *The eye that mocks a father
and despises a mother's instructions
will be plucked out by ravens of the valley
and eaten by vultures.*

Sedimentary cereal.

Since the title of this sermon is rather odd, I'm going to end the suspense and tell you up front where it comes from. When the kids were little, they thought it was funny that I would pour in three or four kinds of cereal into a single bowl. First some Shredded Wheat biscuits, then maybe some Cheerios, then perhaps some Raison Bran, and then perhaps to top it off, some Rice Krispies. They would laugh at the breakfast table when I did this. I would explain that it was very important that you layer them properly: the ones on the bottom had to be the least likely to go soggy, and on top were the ones that were most likely to get soggy. What's funny is that the kids started copying me, eating multiple kinds of cereal layered

together. It was Martina, our eldest, who in elementary school came up with what our family now calls this technique: sedimentary cereal, you know, like the many layers of sandstone that collect over the eons as a giant river dries up. I'm only going to have something very simple to say about this, but I'll get back to it.

Our Bible passages today might be a record for me in their shortness. All we have are two proverbs that appear near the end of the Book of Proverbs. Our first proverb comes from a chapter that isn't considered very politically correct these days. It has to do with what makes a good wife. The proverbs in Chapter 31 tell us that a good wife is hard to find, her husband can trust her, she acts appropriately, she is diligent in taking care of her family, her home is always properly stocked with food so no one goes hungry, she starts work early in the morning doing things like baking bread, she takes care of herself and has lots of energy, she is shrewd in business, she makes clothing for her family, she takes care of the poor, bad weather is no problem because she makes sure her family has warm clothing, she is charming and poised, she is wise and kind. And next is our proverb for today: she is praised and blessed by her family.

I want to discuss this issue of being blessed by one's family. As many or most of you are aware, Wendy was very sick recently. I'm not going to describe the details of this medical emergency. What I want to talk about is the

relationship between a woman and her husband and children. I took Wendy to the ER at Boulder Community Hospital at 5 in the morning when she started having truly agonizing pain in her gut. You are all probably aware that I am a chaplain there. Because of the Covid-19 crisis, they made me wait outside while a team worked on Wendy. When I inquired about an hour or so later as to her condition, one of the nurses looked at my chaplain's badge and said that she could go ahead and let me in. Once inside the trauma bay, I was told that Wendy would probably need surgery. I texted our three kids to tell them what was happening. One lives in Boulder with us, one lives in Westminster, and one lives in downtown Denver. They all immediately responded, with the one in Denver, our daughter Martina, who is a doctor, phoning me. Before I could even say hello, Martina said she would be there in forty minutes.

Anyone who has had children grow up to become adults knows that at some point, there is a role reversal. I'm a technical guy and I can generally fix almost any computer that's at all fixable. I worked on cars as a kid because my father managed a combined tire shop and garage. But the truth is that I don't really like to run around the house fixing the refrigerator, the furnace, the garbage disposal, and the sprinkler system. I'm actually not that good at it and have to learn how to do these things. Our son, who is studying to be an

environmental engineer, is now the one who does all these things without me even having to ask. He takes to it naturally, like my father and brother. Modern cars are far more complicated to repair now because of the complex electronics in them, and the real role reversal happened when our minivan fritzed out and Julien repaired the electrical system. Suddenly, I wasn't even the car guy in the family anymore, and yes, he repairs computers for me, too. He's great with cell phones. Our daughter Isabelle teaches fourth graders in a school that is half native English speakers and half native Spanish speakers. I'm the one who grew up in a Hispanic neighborhood, but she's the one who is fluent in Spanish and loves these kids like you would not believe. And yes, she's also the one who now teaches me all about the incredible beauty of Mexican, Central American, and South American culture. If you ever want to visit people who are not angry, selfish, entitled Americans, just go south, through New Mexico or Texas and keep going.

But back to this very scary incident with Wendy. The CAT scan that they did on her indicated that there was a complete blockage, and Wendy and I told them that due to a massive infection, she had had a major surgery in her gut fourteen years before, and I asked if scar tissue from that surgery could have wrapped itself around Wendy's colon and caused a complete blockage. We were told

probably not, because the blockage didn't seem to be near the site of that old surgery. The doctor said that it could be colon cancer. My head was spinning, of course. But now comes our proverb. I love to do proverbs here. These are those pithy, clever, wise sayings written by Israelite sages. They teach us how to live intelligent, godly lives. They tell us that if we use those minds that God gave us and if we think before we act, we will not only be a lot happier in the long run, we will find ourselves living in the Kingdom of God right now and forever. Here's our first proverb today: *Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her.* Okay. As for the second part, I hope you all know how much I do indeed praise Wendy. She was unbelievably calm during this entire emergency. But let's look at that first part, about her kids rising up and calling her blessed. Well, they rose up.

But here's the thing that really hit me. We all know that in today's medical world, you have to advocate for yourself or have someone advocate for you. They shot Wendy up with morphine, easing her pain, but also making her less capable of speaking for herself. I talked to the hospitalist and to the surgeon who was called in. Both of these women were extremely kind and articulate, and both of them knew me. I felt a tremendous weight on me. I found myself struggling to think of questions to ask. The RIGHT questions, of course. We all have this fear

during a medical emergency that if we don't volunteer the right information about our loved one's medical history, or if we don't ask just the right questions, and we are then asked to make a decision, we will make the wrong one and something horrible will happen. I am essentially an engineer, not a medical person. I found myself holding Wendy's hand, comforting her, but having no clue as to what to do. Then, suddenly, Martina arrived, having easily talked her way into the ER, despite the Covid-19 restrictions that were supposed to prevent visitors from entering the ER. Martina immediately took over. The child was rescuing the parent!

Let me wrap the medical stuff up quickly. Martina looked at the CAT scan images with the doctors. They talked them through. Martina asked lots of questions. They moved Wendy to a patient room. Martina and the docs decided that it was necessary to do surgery immediately. I was glad that I wasn't the one who had to decide that this was the right thing to do. Martina sat with me in the chaplains' office during the surgery, which took about four hours. Then, the surgeon came in with a smile on her face. She told us that the surgery had gone well, and that it was indeed old scar tissue that had wrapped itself around Wendy's colon.

In the days that followed, all three of our kids showed great devotion to their mother, taking turns visiting her in the hospital. During every allowed minute of visitor time, one of them was there, and I would periodically come in, using my chaplain's badge to sidestep the single visitor at a time limitation.

Martina was particularly aggressive about getting involved in every step of the post-surgery treatment. Five days later, Wendy came home. My kids had responded to the many years of their mother's deep love by reflecting that love back at her. And I was almost completely relieved of that horrible strain of being the loved one who has to somehow navigate the medical world instantaneously and effectively advocate for a loved one. All I had to do was be there.

I want to talk about our second proverb. This is from the thirtieth chapter of Proverbs. Sometimes a series of proverbs are related. In this case, number seventeen, our proverb, is unrelated to sixteen before it and eighteen after it. It stands alone, out of context. It simply describes the horrific consequences of disobeying one's parents. You're probably wondering why I included it. Here's the truth: I put it in my sermon today just for fun. I mean, this is a pretty heavy-duty sermon. It's all about the pastor's wife having emergency surgery to relieve a complete blockage of her colon. So, I figured I should lighten things up, and what's better than: ¹⁷ *The eye that mocks a father and despises a mother's*

instructions will be plucked out by ravens of the valley and eaten by vultures. The next time your kid or your grandkid ignores what you tell them to do, remember this one. Put it on the refrigerator.

But seriously, today I want to express my deep sense of family that I felt during Wendy's medical emergency. My parents were good people, but in many ways, the five of us, my mother, father, brother, sister, and I were not that close. We did very little together. I had no sense of extended family, as all of my parents' relatives were on the east coast, three thousand miles away, and there were only a handful of them, anyway. As a result, when Wendy and I began to have children, I didn't have the family-centered traditions that Wendy grew up with. So, it was Wendy who, for the most part, began those traditions in our family. We have birthday dinners, rent a cabin in Rocky Mountain National Park twice a year, and do other things that bring us together as a family. Wendy is responsible for all of this. The impact of this on all of us is deep. Indeed, *Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her.*

I want to return to sedimentary cereal. This is one of our family traditions, the only one I initiated. I started it accidentally and not with the loving deliberation that Wendy has shown when she has started other traditions of ours. We rise up and bless and praise each other by sitting around and eating our layers

of cereal. This reminds me of our first proverb today. This underscores how easy it is as children of God to find joy in everyday family life. Please pray with me.

God, you created us in your image. And so, like you, we are not meant to be isolated creatures. We are drawn to each other. One of the most important things about churches like this one is that it is a faith family where we support one another spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Thank you for creating us this way, because this gives us the ability to feel joy and a deep sense of belonging, even if we have very little in the way of material assets. As believers, each of us can walk in the footsteps of your son, feel the warm presence of the Holy Spirit within us, and enjoy the simple pleasures of being with family, neighbors, coworkers, and fellow believers. And God, we know that there are many people who do find themselves isolated. Please help us as a faith family support those among us who are alone. Please help those who need contact to have the courage to reach out to the rest of us so that we can respond and be present for them. Amen.