

Nurturing Mother

Sit down if you love your mother.

I love my Mom. She lives with one of my sisters now, dementia. She still knows everyone, but she's had a couple of strokes and has to have around-the-clock care, wheelchair bound. She played competitive sports through her early 80s. Has gold medals in basketball and softball and badminton, and she's only 5 feet tall.

My mother came to all my soccer games at Charlotte Christian, even came to most of the ones when I coached here in the late 80s and early 90s.

Just like yours, my mother gave me life, fed me, clothed me, sustained me. She took care of my brother and sisters and father and her own mother and lots of other people along the way.

Now that she's in her later years, she needs those whom she nurtured to do some nurturing for her.

By taking care of her needs, we have found that doing so continues to give us the sustenance we always received from her. Our care for her breeds caring about each other. My brother and sisters and I communicate more now than we ever had before; we love each other more deeply now than we ever did.

We even share a family cabin. My grandparents bought that little hunter's cabin when my mother was a girl. When the family visits there separately or together, we always reminisce as we create new memories. Like my own mother, that cabin in Cedar Mountain, North Carolina, shelters us still and we cherish it as we do the rest of our family heritage.

My wife and I went to the cabin this past weekend. There's no cell phone service there, so we were somewhat incommunicado -- a very relaxing time for her especially. We took a couple of hikes with our beagles through DuPont State Forest; our cabin backs up to that beautiful place. There we found a bit of rest even though we came home exhausted. What has this to do with my mother? And what has this to do with this assembly?

I'm thinking about "the nurturing mother" and how we need to be about nurturing mother and what that looks like. The Latin term for nurturing mother is Alma Mater. Charlotte Christian School has been and continues to be our nurturing mother. If nothing else, she's fed us knowledge and given us all that we need for life because she's given us the Word of God. 2 Peter 1:3 teaches us that the power of God comes from knowing Christ Jesus, and that power sustains us.

In the 1970s, when Thomas Eckel was head of school, the lower school included the classrooms in one hallway of the current middle school building. The upper school (grades 7-12 then) met in classrooms in the gym that are now the weight room, coaches' offices, locker rooms, and the trainers' room. Charlotte Christian offered a great little Christian school for Christian families. In the early '80s we added the main body of the upper school building.

I graduated in the top twenty of my class. Of course, there weren't quite 20 members of the class of '81. Now, about eight heads-of-school later, in any given class, we have more than 100 headed to some of the finest colleges and universities in the world.

Over the years, our alma mater has gone through lots of changes, both physically and spiritually. One constant, though, continues to be the Gospel of Grace.

My nurturing parents sent me to Charlotte Christian when I turned 13 years old. My birthday is almost always the first day of school, of course. With teen angst and feeling invisible, I soon found someone to pick on, Barry Ballard. One year behind me in school, a little shorter and rounder too, the perfect passive target. Whenever I saw him in the hallway (yes, the one hallway in the gym, that same one), I'd give him a hard punch in the shoulder and call him Fairy. The sadder point is that my descent into self-absorbed foolishness only started there. It lasted through ninth grade and into the tenth. Much of what I did came from insecurity because either I'd not yet formed my identity or the identity I'd begun to form came from what I looked like or what I said or what I did. None of those things really identify us though.

By the end of my sophomore year, I recommitted my life to Christ. The fact that God has had me teach tenth grade English for over thirty years must have some meaning: unfinished business? the time in my life when God impacted me most directly?

Anyway, by the time I was a senior in high school, the kid I picked on in junior high (middle school now) was one of my best friends. Among the many great lessons that I learned at Charlotte Christian is the lesson Barry taught me. Forgiveness is not earned. He continues to display God's Grace to me. We both worked at Camp Lurecrest for several summers in high school and beyond, and I remember standing near the pool and having a long talk with Barry once. Struck by Christ's completed work on the cross, we decided to invent our own denomination. We were going to call it Grace Foundationalism.

The good news of Christ's salvation, though completely undeserving, is ours! From that spot, everything else works out fine. Our behavior doesn't define us. Our identity must be in Christ alone because of Grace alone through Faith alone for God's glory alone. We know this because by Scripture alone.

Barry's a pastor now in a small town in Pennsylvania, has been for decades. To this day I consider Barry my closest friend, even if we don't see each other for years at a time. We're both still Grace Foundationalists even though our church affiliations aren't the same.

Like everything else, even here at CCS, changes keep coming -- fast; but one thing never changes and doesn't have to change ever as long as we take care of our Mom. Charlotte Christian can always be all about its foundation on the Gospel. After all, this institution was born because of a Billy Graham Crusade. Charlotte Christian's mission has always been built on the Gospel.

My grades 8-12 experiences bring up far too many memories to distill into a few minutes; too many mixed emotions. Many extremely positive; many, not so much. Sometimes we might feel ambivalent about our alma mater. Sometimes we need to leave home for a time to make our own way. Sooner or later we return home, figuratively or literally. Isaiah 55:11 teaches that the Word of the Lord always does what it's supposed to do.

I'm happy to be speaking on "Alien Day." On the one hand, Charlotte Christian is my home, has been since 1976; on the other, I'm only passing through. Our real home is in Heaven and we are just sojourners here for a while, aliens.

In very many of the best ways, though, Charlotte Christian School is my nurturing mother, my alma mater. She is yours too.

So, we honor our mother; we cherish our mother; we admire our mother. For many of us in the room, the framework from which we view the world comes from our experiences here at our alma mater.

Thank you, Mr. Giller, Coach Fronk, and members of the alumni board for the generous honor. I'm grateful. Thanks especially to the alumni who send their own children here. For Kathy and me, we found no better investment in our son's education than for him to be a Charlotte Christian lifer. He's also an alum, class of 2014. And, finally, thanks to you students who've been gracious to listen to an older guy talk about his mother. When you go home to day, tell your mother that you love her.