

# LYNYRD'S LYRICS

**A Sermon by the Rev. Dr. Arthur M. Suggs  
Preached on Mother's Day, May 10, 2015**

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

## **I Had a Friend with a Lead Foot**

It is impossible for me to let this day roll around without remembering probably the most unusual Mother's Day of my life. It happened that I was away from my family on this day.

I had a friend, Greg, who owned a small manufacturing business. He had a lead foot and had gathered enough speeding tickets that the authorities took his license away. Unfortunately for him he needed to take an important business trip down in North Carolina. So he asked if I would go along and act as his driver.

We flew down to North Carolina late one week, and he had three stops he needed to make. At the airport Greg rented a red Ford Mustang convertible with a V8 engine, so I delighted in driving it for him on this trip.

## **Hopping Happily into This Great Car, We Took off with Me Driving**

On Friday we motored to business number one. He headed into his meetin' while I stayed outside sittin' in the car. Then we rented a motel room and went out to dinner. Saturday we did the same thing again. Drove to the second manufacturin' plant, and he had his meetin' with them.

Sunday morning rolls around. It's Mother's Day, and we're in rural North Carolina. We had about a three-hour drive from the motel to the third business that he needed to visit. So we're toolin' along in the back country, an' we decided to turn on the radio.

## **Nothin' but Religion an' Country**

Now ponder this for a moment. What are we goin' to discover on the radio in rural North Carolina on Mother's Day mornin'? So we turned on the radio, an' we hit a religious station. Some Southern Baptist preacher is goin' at it full force.

We tuned to a 'nother station. A 'nother Southern Baptist goin' at it, burnin' up the airwaves. An' a 'nother one. An' a 'nother one. Then we hit a country station. An' then we go back on the dial. Kep' turnin' it. A 'nother religious station. A 'nother country station. All the way across the entire dial. Nothin' but moanin' country an' bejesus religion.

Finally Greg turns to me and sez, "So what's yer pleasure? Would ya like a sermon, or do ya' want country? An' I decided, "Ya know, it's Mother's Day mornin', Sunday mornin'. Let's have us a sermon." So he turns the dial one more time, and sure 'nuff, this preacher feller had just begun his sermon on Mother's Day mornin'. Little did

I know, with all of my theological sophistication, that I was about to hear one of the most beautiful, most memorable sermons of my life.

This guy had a preacher's kind a tale a woe. Now bear in mind this was thirty years ago, an' I still remember it. That's how good of a sermon it was.

### **The Preacher's Sob Story**

He started to tell a story about a family of four. The father had passed on. The mother lived a lonesome life becuz the kids had flown the coop. There were three a them, an' each one had their own lives, their own responsibilities, their own marriages, their own jobs, their own kids. An' their mother, who lived alone, started to have difficulty taking care of the house. She had trouble feeding herself correkly. Wasn't eating proper nutrition anymore. Started to have health issues. She was on a downward spiral.

All a this took years. Took time. It don't happen all at once. And the kids, who were extremely busy goin' on with their lives, were clueless. They thought everything was goin' well, no problems.

But the day finally arrived when the kids, who had fallen into the habit a givin' their mom a call every other day or so, could not raise 'er on the phone. So they called a neighbor to go in and check on 'er, and sure 'nuff, she had died in 'er house, all alone.

### **'Er Kids Done 'er Wrong**

Between pleas ta prime the pump for cash, this person then started analyzing the

situation as a preacher is like to do. It all seemed so reasonable. It was all so forgivable. 'Ceptin' he decided not to forgive 'em. 'Stead, he started railin' on those three kids. He roasted 'em, "What about that commandment ta honor yer pappy an' yer momma?" All a those responsibilities, but seriously, did they trump the responsibility a takin' care a their momma?

Shouldn't them have looked out for the simple things that might have helped to lengthen 'er life an' would have provided some sense a fulfillment at the end? She shouldn't have been left ta die neglected an' lonely, unwanted in 'er own house?

An' he decided that, "No, they done wrong. They neglected their responsibility." An' then he hit a crescendo in his sermon. He got my full attention at this point, an' he summed it up, yellin', "Y'all folks wanna know what I'm preachin' 'bout this Sunday?" He roared:

### ***"TAKE CARE A YO' MOMMA!"***

I don't talk that way generally, but he made his point. An' then 'e went on to a 'nother story. This time it was a glory story about a family a two. Once again, an elderly mother an' a' only son. But in this case the son did the right thing. He started looking after his mom and took care a her in 'er old age, sometimes hiring help, sometimes running interference for her in medical affairs.

All the different nuanced things that are neces-sary to help somebody have fulfilling years in late life. She died peacefully in 'er old age an' lived pretty much as long and as well as she coulda.

Next the preacher went into a 'nother story. When all was said and done, this sermon took a whole hour. It was just one story after a 'nother. A negative story. A positive story. A negative story. A positive story.

And can you guess the interjection that intervened between every story, over and over again?

***“TAKE CARE A YO’ MOMMA!”***

So now, it has been six years ago that my parents entered a time in their lives when the situation wasn't merely bad. It had become untenable. Something needed to be done. My dad was in hospice. My mom was unable to take care of him anymore. Intervention of some sort or a 'nother was clearly needed. Do you think that sermon came to my mind? By now that would have been twenty-five years earlier.

***“TAKE CARE A YO’ MOMMA!”..***

Yes, I had to rise to the challenge. Tracy and I talked it through. We talked it through with the extended family. We looked at everything from which way to Sunday at the different options. But the pressure was there. Do what is right. Do what is honorable.

***“TAKE CARE A YO’ MOMMA!”***

I was moved by that sermon and its stern injunction. Moved not by its sophistication or by its depth of biblical exegesis. It didn't have any. I was moved by its moral clarity. There was no vagueness. There was no wishy-washy stuff. If the right thing to do is plain, go ahead and do it. No com-plaining. That's what I needed at that point.

But now, time has passed. Both parents have passed on. It's Mother's Day, and I'd like to ask a follow-up question. I'd like to take this down at least one more level.

**Why Should I?**

My follow-up question is this: Why should I take care of my parents? They've done their part. Let me do my part now. Let me live my life. Why do we have Mother's Day? Why do we have flowers? We received some flowers in the mail yesterday. Our two children sent my wife some flowers that are now on our kitchen table. Why'd they do that? Why this emphasis? Why do we have Father's Day and Grandfather's Day? And why do we have sermons like this? I'm only one of thousands of preachers this morning, here and now, at this moment, talking about Mother's Day.

**Primal Lessons on Mom's Knee**

My best guess is that I think this devotion to mothers touches something very primal in our lives. Not just our biological lives but also our mental lives, our spiritual lives, our emotional lives. I think it touches something very deep within us, something subterranean that we usually don't even allow to reach the surface. Whether we acknowledge it or not, whether we speak about it or not, whether we're conscious of it or not, I think at some level we know that we would not be alive, we wouldn't be here without our mothers.

We also have a similar understanding that we learned our first lessons on our mother's knee. How to share. How not to hit our little sister. Our first lesson is what the

golden rule is all about. Do you want somebody to steal your lunch? Do you want somebody to trip you in the hallway? Then don't do it to somebody else. It's a child's version of the golden rule, ingrained in our soul, usually by our mother, sitting on her knee.

### **Something Primal Between Mom & Kids**

We also know a few stories. In grade school we learn about mama bear and the three cubs, and we realize that you don't want to get between mama and the cubs. People have lost their lives doing that. You don't do it because there's something primal between mama and the cubs. The only reason we don't is because a bear has teeth and claws! But it's like that with almost every kind of animal. You don't get between mom and the babies. You just don't.

Have you ever seen little hatchlings of geese, and you go to look at them to see how cute they are, and then the mom and dad come over. You can only get so close. I challenge you. Try to get near those babies.

### **Mom Perishes While Protecting Her Kids**

Another story knocked me for a loop. There was a forest fire out West, and a ranger was walking through the forest after the fire had moved on and things had cooled down. Everything, everywhere you look, is charred. Walking along, the ranger spots a dead quail. (This incident went viral on the internet a couple years ago; some of you may have heard this story before.)

Anyway he sees this dead quail, charred, burnt to a crisp, leaning up against a tree trunk. He grabs a stick and knocks the dead

bird over. Out from under her pop three little chicks that had been saved by their mother from the fire. You want to know fierceness in the face of certain death? You want to know ferocity in strength of will? Think of that quail. Put yourself in its place, facing the fearsome fire and sacrificing her life but never budging, protecting the little ones. There's something pretty primal going on there.

### **Here's My Best Thought: Primal Knowing Equals Simple Love**

I apologize ahead of time, but it's the best I've got. It's my best thought about primal knowing. I'm going to give you an equation. (There's no such thing as a good sermon without at least one equation.)

The equation is about primal knowing, that "knowing" or understanding, that our life was given to us by our mother. That primal knowing is one of those first lessons. That primal knowing of the first person to cherish you, to love you unconditionally, even though you never yet have done anything to call for it, just by being who you are, that you are loved.

Primal knowing equals simple love, the unadulterated, pure kind of love without any conditions attached to it. That primal knowing that we have as little kids, that we remember now in our older years, equals the purity of love that we hear about and read about and experience.

For me, simplicity has a quality that's very important. One of the lowest points in my life, and it was pretty low, lower than a snake, as they say, was when I was clinically

depressed. Things were wrong in virtually every facet of my life. I was trying to keep a smile on my face, and I had a nice pretense, but I was pretty cruddy on the inside.

### **Lynyrd's Lyrics Bring an Epiphany**

I was driving along, and a song came on the radio: "Simple Man" by Lynyrd Skynyrd. Now, I love The Allman Brothers Band, Lynyrd Skynyrd, and southern classic rock. I've always loved it. Whenever I go down to Macon, Georgia, I genuflect at Duane Allman's grave. So this song comes on, and I'm listening to it, simply because it's Lynyrd Skynyrd, first of all. Somehow or other, I had never heard this song before. It wasn't like I knew it and remembered it.

And so here are some of the lyrics:

"Momma told me when I was young,  
'Come sit beside me, my only son,  
And listen closely to what I say,  
And if you do this,  
It will help you some sunny day.

" 'Take your time.  
Don't live too fast.  
Troubles will come,  
and they will pass.  
Find a woman, and you'll find love,  
And don't forget, son,  
There is someone up above.' "

And here's the refrain:

" 'And be a simple kind of man.  
Be something you love  
and understand.  
Baby, be a simple kind of man.  
Oh, won't you do this for me, son,  
if you can.' "

And then it goes through several more lines. This song started at the Johnson City traffic circle, and by the time I got to the first refrain, I was somewhere near Davis College. I started to cry, and I pulled into Davis College, into their parking lot. I just sat there and listened and bawled.

Then this line comes a bit later:

" 'Boy, don't you worry.  
You'll find yourself.  
Follow your heart,  
And nothing else.  
And you can do this,  
If you try.  
All that I want for you, my son,  
Is to be satisfied.

There were a few more lines after that, but I don't remember them at all. I was a mess.

### **God Spoke to Me via the Radio**

So the UCC has this rather weird notion that God is still speaking. God spoke to me that day. He gave me words on the radio, and I decided I was going to use those words. The experience was going to turn my life around, and I was going to be simple. Everything in my life was complex at that time, and I was going to simplify, simplify, simplify. I was going to follow my heart and nothing else. And I was going to be a simple kind of man, and I was going to love again and follow that kind of direction.

It's not rocket science. For what you do the rest of today, this coming week, this coming month, make sure love is in it. It's a commandment from our Lord. This I command you, that you love one another. It is not optional. Love one another. In the things

that you do this coming week, this coming month, make sure that they are deeds that are motivated by love.

***“TAKE CARE A YO’ MOMMA!”***

And if she has already passed, or if she is really obstinate and mule-like, do your best.

I know it’s hard. And if they’ve already passed, take care of somebody else. For when we take care of each other, when we love each other, we make the world a better place.

*Amen.*