



Crowned with Tender Mercies

Bless the Lord who crowns you with tender mercies (Psalm 103, NKJV).

One winter day when our son Carlton was four, he spent the afternoon playing at his friend Elliot's house. When he arrived home he commented with apparent confusion that Elliot's mother didn't study at all. He had assumed that all mothers spent most of their days "studying." Some years later the two boys were having a dust up that quickly deteriorated into a shouting match—whose dad could beat the other one.

When that proved inconclusive, Elliot brought out his big guns. At least his mother would never sit him on the front steps with a clock and tell him to start walking to preschool when the alarm rang.

Carlton returned home alarmed—and not just because he had no malicious dirt to hurl at Elliot's mother. Had I really done that? Crazy thing is that I didn't actually remember.

But I did admit that it sure sounded like something I'd do. The church with the preschool was only four houses away; and the college where I taught was a block in the other direction. But, truth be told, I did raise a free-range kid.

Carlton is now "retired," overseeing his twelve rental properties; and this past summer he walked his daughter down the aisle at her wedding.

As for me, I've continued teaching—and studying. Most recently my studies have taken me back to Old Wittenberg, where Katharina von Bora raised a half dozen free-range kids, all the while operating a boarding house the size of a small Holiday Inn with adjoining gardens and pastures for her livestock and poultry.

Wife of the famed Reformer, Martin Luther, Katie was the breadwinner of the family. She bought and sold farms, kept a close eye on the hired hands, and somehow managed to keep her overbearing and unstable husband from going off the rails.

The published product of my studies was *Katie Luther: First Lady of the Reformation*. Katie was a very protective mother, more so than her

husband. But it was Martin who expressed himself in what we might term motherly qualities. Here he imagines the words of a celibate theologian:

"Alas, must I rock the baby, wash its diapers, make its bed, smell its stench, stay up nights with it, take care of it when it cries, heal its rashes and sores?...What, should I make such a prisoner of myself? O you poor wretched fellow, have you taken a wife? Fie, fie upon such wretchedness and bitterness!"

His own perspective, however, is the opposite: "How is it that I, without any merit, have come to this distinction of being certain that I am

How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.—Matthew 27:37

serving Thy creature and Thy most precious will. O how gladly will I do so."

As with most mothers, however, day-in-day-out with the kids can be exasperating. On one occasion when Katie was away managing one of her farms, Martin, home with the kids, remarked, "Christ said we must become as little children to enter the kingdom of heaven. Dear, God, have we got to become such idiots?"

The most painful sorrow the parents endured was the death of their thirteen-year-old daughter Magdalena. "Ah! Sweet Lenchen," Martin whispered as she took her last breath, "you will rise again and you will shine like a star, yes, like the sun! I am happy in the spirit, but my earthly form is very sad."

It is difficult to imagine Katie saying she was "happy in the spirit." She was, in fact, devastated beyond words.

Martin Luther, bombastic to a fault, had an amazing streak of motherly tenderness. The words of Jesus speaking to Jerusalem come to mind: "How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings." The great Reformer, by God's grace, was crowned with tender mercies. □

—Ruth Tucker