

Sixth Weekend of Easter (RCL/B), Mother's Day: "Mother Jesus"  
1 John 5:1-6, John 15:9-17  
May 8-9, 2021  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

This weekend we celebrate mothers, our mothers, those who gave birth to us and those who have adopted or fostered us, literally or figuratively, all the women who have "parented" us along the way by nurturing, teaching, guiding, redirecting us onto lifegiving paths, all those who have alternately supported and challenged us, as the situation has required.

There are a lot of mother stereotypes, spanning quite a spectrum. Mothers are nature's **nurturers**: tender, the source of life, the source of hugs, the source of food. Mothers are fierce **protectors**: when "mother bear" shows up, she's loaded for bear to keep her cubs safe. Mothers are **generals**; there's an iron hand in that velvet glove; no one exerts "tough love" like a mom.

We've had a whole series of Gospels, including this week's, from St. John's Last Supper discourse, his sharing of our Lord Jesus' words the night before He died. Over and over we've heard Jesus invite us to "abide," "dwell," "remain," **live, thrive**, in Him. He is the Vine; we are the branches. Separated from Him, we wither as surely as a branch pruned from a tree or a flower cut from its stem. Spiritually we are like a baby, still in the womb, in absolute need of the umbilical cord connection to its mother, dependent on that lifeline for food and oxygen.

We often refer to ourselves as "children of God," in the Bible's beautiful lingo 😊. If we are children, God is the parent, and we usually think in terms of the male parent, since Scripture often describes God that way. Jesus memorably taught us to pray, "Abba, our Father in heaven...." Jesus was male, for sure, but apart from Jesus, God is spirit, neither male nor female. We have a **personal** relationship with this Holy Trinity who created, redeemed, and sanctifies us, so we use human relational terms we understand, like Parent and child, Father, Mother, daughter, son.

God is so much bigger than we can describe, so far beyond our understanding, that we can really only nibble at the edges and say, "God is like...." Scripture gives both masculine and feminine qualities to God. (I say feminine and masculine, not male and female, because female and male have to do with gender but feminine and masculine describe characteristics that either males **or** females can have.) Here are some maternal metaphors. From Deuteronomy 32:

As an eagle stirs up its nest,  
     and hovers over its young;  
 as it spreads its wings, takes them up,  
     and bears them aloft on its pinions,  
 the LORD alone guided [Israel].... (Dt. 32:11-12a)

...[The LORD] nursed [Israel] with honey from the crags.... (Dt. 32:13c)

You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you;  
     you forgot the God who gave you birth. (Dt. 32:18)

God asks Job:

From whose womb did the ice come forth,  
     and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven? (Job 38:29)

Through the prophet Isaiah the LORD has this to say:

For a long time I have held my peace,  
     I have kept still and restrained myself;  
 now I will cry out like a woman in labor,  
     I will gasp and pant. (Isa. 42:14)

Listen to me... all...  
 who have been borne by me from your birth,  
     carried from the womb;  
 even to your old age I am he,  
     even when you turn gray I will carry you.  
 I have made, and I will bear;  
     I will carry and I will save. (Isa. 46:3-4)

Can a woman forget her nursing child,  
     or show no compassion for the child of her womb?  
 Even these may forget,  
     yet I will not forget you.  
 See, I have inscribed you on the palm of my hands.... (Isa. 49:15-16a)

As a mother comforts her child,  
 so I will comfort you;  
 you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. (Isa. 66:13)

Through the prophet Hosea the Lord says:

When Israel was a child, I loved him...  
 ...[I]t was I who taught Ephraim to walk,  
 I took them up in my arms;  
 but they did not know that I healed them.  
 I led them with cords of human kindness,  
 with bands of love.  
 I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks.  
 I bent down to them and fed them. (Hosea 11:1, 3-4)

I have been the LORD your God ever since the land of Egypt... I will fall upon them  
 like a bear robbed of her cubs.... (Hosea 13:4, 8a)

(Now we see the “mother bear” imagery is cross-cultural and in use for thousands of years!)

Jesus used this maternal imagery for Himself as He wept over Jerusalem before His passion,  
 death and resurrection:

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent  
 to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her  
 brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” (Matthew 23:37; cf. Luke 13:34)

“Mother Jesus” pops up every once in a while in our worship prayers, and you may have wondered  
 why. Through the ages there have been people of faith who have related to our Lord in this way,  
 and their spiritual writings help us expand **our** thinking and **our** praying to include the maternal  
 and feminine aspects of our God.

This past Friday, May 7, is the day on our calendar of commemorations when we remember  
 Julian of Norwich, a fourteenth century anchoress, a hermit-like woman of prayer, credited with  
 being the first woman to write a book in English. The book is *Revelations of Divine Love*, and in it  
 she describes her visions of the loving Christ who suffered for us. She wrote, “...[O]ur saviour is  
 our true Mother, in whom we are endlessly born and out of whom we shall never come.”<sup>1</sup> “Our

great Father, almighty God... wanted the second person to become our Mother, our brother and our saviour. From this it follows that as truly as God is our Father, so truly is God our Mother. Our Father wills, our Mother works, our good Lord the Holy Spirit confirms.”<sup>2</sup> Referring to the lance wound in our Lord’s side from the soldier’s spear, Julian says rather than suckling children at his breast, Jesus leads them into the breast, through his “sweet open side, in order to show us there a part of the godhead and of the joys of heaven, with inner certainty of endless bliss.”<sup>3</sup>

In today’s Gospel we hear the new commandment, that we should love each other, as the Lord loves us, boundlessly. We fear sometimes that we don’t deserve to be loved, and that is often true. But in those Spirit-ed moments when we realize how undeserving we are, let us also rejoice that **grace reigns**. Like a mother’s love for her child, we never **were** or **are** loved “because”; a mother loves a child “just because....” God loves us “just because....” Mother Jesus’ arms are always open to us, even when we have **least** loved one another as He has loved us. Julian says:

...our courteous Mother [Jesus] does not wish us to flee away, for nothing would be less pleasing to him; but he then wants us to behave like a child. For when it is distressed and frightened, it runs quickly to its mother; and if it can do no more, it calls to the mother for help with all its might. So he wants us to act as a meek child, saying:  
 my kind Mother,  
 my gracious Mother,  
 my beloved Mother,  
 have mercy on me. I have made myself... unlike you, and may not and cannot make it right except with your help and grace.<sup>4</sup>

It is his office to save us, it is his glory to do it, and it is his will that we know it; for he wants us to love him sweetly and trust in him meekly and greatly. And he revealed this in these gracious words: I protect you very safely.<sup>5</sup>

Amen

<sup>1</sup> *Julian of Norwich: Showings (Classics of Western Spirituality, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1978)*, p. 292.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 296.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 298.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 301.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 302.