



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

On Mothering

By The Rev. Sharon Gracen

May 11, 2014

The collect for Mother's Day that we heard earlier comes from a book called *Women's Uncommon Prayers*, I must get a copy. Mother's Day celebrated in the church is often filled with more pain than we might realize. Step mothers have been known to skip the day because it's hard to know whether this day is for them. For those women who are not and may never be mothers, whether by choice or by fate, this day can be insensitive. Or for women who were mothers, imagine Mother's Day in Newtown. So I was very glad when Bishop Laura Ahrens shared this prayer with me earlier in the week. It gives a generous acknowledgement of the complex nature of this day.

Julian of Norwich lived in medieval England in the late 14th century. She is recognized as one of the great mystics of our faith. Her direct experience of God came during a grave illness when she was near death. She had a series of ecstatic visions of Jesus, particularly his suffering. After that, she dedicated her life to serving Christ's world as an anchorite, a person called to a solitary life, not one that was cut-off from the world, but one anchored in it. She spent her entire adult life in a small room attached to the side of the Church of St. Julian in Norwich, England, in prayer and giving counsel with those who came to her seeking guidance and wisdom. They spoke through a small window as there was no door.

Julian's theology included a vision of the Trinity as God the Father, Christ the Mother, and the Spirit, as the Good Lord. A bit of her writing has been included in the canticles for our worship...

God chose to be our mother in all things
and so made the foundation of his work,
most humble and most pure,
in the Virgin's womb.

God, the perfect wisdom of all,
arrayed himself in this humble place.

Christ came in our poor flesh
to share a mother's care.

Our mothers bear us for pain and for death;
our true mother, Jesus,
bears us for joy and endless life.

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This connection of Christ to motherhood helps me to separate the idea of "mother" from an obstetrical moment and expands it to a more universal creativity and connection. Prying motherhood from women's work also helps me to embrace the image of "father" in a strictly male way. Father and mother are the archetypes of creativity and stewardship of new life. This is where the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd connects today. He is the protector of the vulnerable and the innocent. He is the seeker of the lost and the healer of the wounded.

Mothers kiss a lot of boo-boos. The curative power in that loving gesture is a big part of growing up. Children come to us with their bumps and bruises and need us to hear about their pain. For the child, there is profound comfort and therefore healing in being heard and having the pain recognized. That is mothering, no matter who does it.

As children grow, their hurts can no longer be healed with a kiss. Human suffering is not a skinned knee and so it takes something different. This Mothers Day, I cannot keep away the image of the hundreds of mothers in Nigeria, who are desperate for the return of their daughters from the terrorists that kidnapped them. They represent the vulnerability of motherhood and fatherhood and Christhood. If as Julian wrote, Christ is our mother, he feels the pain, not just as a parent, but the cumulative pain of all parents who cannot keep their vulnerable loved ones from harm. No amount of kisses can make right what has happened to the Nigerian girls.

I heard a short piece by Brene Brown this week. For those of you who haven't heard the countless references to Brene, she is a Social Worker and researcher who had become very popular for her work on vulnerability and shame. During the course of her research, that uncovered the uncomfortable realization that vulnerability is necessary for authentic living, Brene experienced a life changing awakening, or as she calls it, a breakdown. It was at that time she also rediscovered faith. It's amazing the places you will look when you are hurting. She said, ***"I thought faith would say, I'll take away the pain and discomfort, but what it ended up saying was, I'll sit with you in it." That is how we need to be mothered when we grow past asking to have our boo-boos kissed. That's what Brene found when she started attending the Episcopal Cathedral in Houston. In some way, the church mothers us. It makes sense in an associative property kind of way. You remember from math class that if $a=b$, and $b=c$, then $a=c$. So if Christ is our mother, and we are the Body of Christ, then we have a mothering, nurturing role for each other. We might call it Pastoral Care, but it happens any time we sit with someone who is hurting. It happens when we tell someone, "me too, I've been there." It happens when we shield someone from harm or look for them when they are lost, or are just happy to see them when they return. Good mothers celebrate accomplishments and make room at the table for all who come.***

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Mothering is not easy work. The Bible offers us proof of that. Eve, the first mother, was also the first woman to lose a child to violence and the first to have a child become violent. Sarah was barren until she was in her nineties and then she had Isaac, which is its own kind of horror story. Rebecca had twins and watched as one was favored over the other which led to dangerous rivalry. Rachel, the mother of Joseph and Benjamin died in childbirth but is considered the mother of the Northern Kingdom of Israel which was overrun by the Assyrians in 721 BCE. The Book of Samuel and the Gospel of Matthew both speak of Rachel's perpetual grief over her lost children. And of course we know Mary's story and the sword that pierced her heart as she stood at the foot of the cross upon which her son died.

Jesus redefined motherhood, indeed all relationships when one day he was told that his mother and brothers were waiting to speak to him. He answered, "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother."

So on this Mother's Day, I invite you all to consider an expanded membership into the role of mother because then we must ask, "Who are my children?" Every child is our child. Every child needs us to love them, to teach them, to fight for them to have enough food to eat, a safe place to sleep, opportunities to learn and to play and to grow up in a peaceful world.

So take your mother to brunch today. Be enchanted with a gift of dandelions clutched in a chubby hand. Pray for the mothers of Nigeria but mostly remember that we are all here to be Christ for the world, to be brother and sister, friend and mother.

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