

“Mothers, Others and Another Kind of Love”  
Easter 6, John 17:20-26; May 8, 2016  
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, Colorado  
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### **I. COME AS YOU ARE**

There’s a saying among clergy, as May approaches each year. It reminds me of something we talked about a few weeks ago about preaching on a certain book of the Bible—the *last* book of the bible, for the record. Remember that? How our favorite book of Revelation (no S!) is often the *last* book that some folks (especially preachers) will go near with a ten-foot pole?

*This* saying about a certain day in May, the second Sunday, in fact, goes something like: “Avoid *doing* Mother’s Day in church like the plague! Run! It’s a Hallmark Day, not a Holy Day, and it’s fraught with danger, and many (especially male) pastors have been skewered on this “loaded” day by trying to preach on it.

Why? Because life, love and family are *not* always like the Hallmark cards, and what is joyful and honoring for one person may be excruciatingly painful for another. What is hopeful and love-filled for one, can be unintentionally hurtful for another. Some folks just plain avoid church on Mother’s Day because it stirs up too much. Too much of everything *but* Good News.

But.

There’s also another saying:  
“Well-behaved churches seldom make history.”

And today, we have chosen to *do* Mother’s Day. Because it *is* important, and, it is a big day in our culture, and because observing and naming the wild *mix* of feelings, emotions, memories and grief is the most honoring thing we can do.

Honoring our mothers, our grandmothers, all the women of so many shapes and sizes and roles who have brought mother-love to our lives. Honoring the grief, the loss, the disappointment, regret and longing that many of us are feeling here today. We’re not going to run from the feelings, the tears, the raw ache.

We’re going to *feel* them. Be mindful. Be Present. Acknowledge together the very human, vulnerable parts of each of us, even as we remember and celebrate mother figures on both sides of the veil.

For, if we have learned nothing else on this journey of community together, we have learned that shoving all those myriad emotions under the rug—for today, for this year, for every year on Mother’s Day and other holidays and anniversaries—does *not* lead to healing and honoring. It merely leads to rug-shoving.

So, we’re gonna lay it all out, bring it all here and talk about mothers, others and another kind of love. A kind that’s not so “other” after all.

## **II. MOTHER JESUS**

Once upon a time, long before the first “official” Mother’s Day, Jesus was gathered with his disciples near the end of his earthly life. He had much to share with them, and it wasn’t that different from a Family Conference.

He has been given the Parental Discourse for several chapters now, in the form of a prayer—praying to the Parent God on behalf of the dearly beloved.

Barbara Lundblad describes the scene:

Then Jesus moves on to pray for those who are sitting at the table with him. Jesus is praying like a mother who has adopted these children. They belonged to God, but God gave them to Jesus to care for, to teach, to nurture. Soon Jesus will go away and he prays for these children with the love of a motherly heart.

Jesus’ prayer doesn’t stop with those seated at the table. “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one.” Jesus is praying also for you and for me. We are the ones who have come to believe because of the disciples’ words.

And what does Jesus pray for, the real heart of the matter: that they will know motherly love, from God the Mother/Father as he has known it. AND, that because of being wrapped in that love they “will all be one.”

Ah, unity. Talk about a loaded, mixed-meaning kind of terms! Christians have been trying to decipher that one for centuries! The United Church of Christ has this scripture as it’s *most central* prayer and identity.

But, this plea of Jesus’ for cohesion among his followers, is *not* a command to all agree on every little thing, and if you don’t, shake the dust off and move on! That may be why we have so many churches in our world. Even in our little town!

People are sometimes surprised to learn what a vast array of folks we have in our church family. All over the political spectrum, all over the economic and education spectrum. From very different backgrounds of faith tradition and religious experience.

We don’t all agree on any number of issues: political candidates, town growth planning, conservation, gun control issues, government control of anything, in fact! Separation of Church and State. Interpretation of the Bible. Inclusion of gender and orientation differences.

Little cups of juice or a goblet of wine; yeasty bread or gluten free! New stove, or fix the old one! Organ or piano or drums and guitar: which is more worshipful? Printed bulletins or words on the screens.

Christians have been wrestling with these words of Jesus for a long, long time. We've debated for centuries how on earth to achieve that, and I think we've often gone in just the opposite direction!

We might have learned along the way, that the wrong way to achieve unity in the church is to try and appeal to everyone. The church humor magazine "The Door" facetiously announced these newly formed churches seeking to do just that. (Kind of a lowest-common-denominator, or Church Lite approach!)

Little Bit O'Bible Church

Theology-Free Church

*Seldom United Church*

Bill Gates' Memorial Geek Orthodox

Church of the Perpetual Building Program

Comfortable Pew Family Center

Clean Bathroom Bible Temple

Better Than the Rest Believer's Fellowship

Feelgood Fellowship

Twist-and-Shout Revival Center

#### **IV. ANOTHER KIND OF LOVE**

Lucy Lind Hogan points out that Christian unity is not really about "agreeing about everything" at all:

"We are one in Christ whether we agree with each other or not. We are one in Christ whether we like one another or not. To become a part of Christ is to become a part of the community; a part of the one.

Jesus' prayer reminds us that our unity, our "oneness" is to be a sign to the world of God's love for us in Jesus Christ. Oneness and unity is about love. And if you have been a part of a family, a member of a church, or a community, you know that within that love there can be disagreements and squabbling. We are human.

But the mystery of the incarnation is that God desired unity with us so much God became one of us. And in that moment we were drawn into the oneness of God, the Creator/Father/Mother, the Son, and the Spirit. It is with God's help that we can live into that oneness.

Another kind of love."

## **V. WHEN MAMA AIN'T HAPPY....**

There's another saying, you might have heard. About mothers, and family and getting long with one another as brothers and sisters.:

“When Mama ain't happy ain't nobody happy!”

It seems a school in West Virginia decided to use that principle recently. They've started a new form of discipline, and it's working wonders! They call it “reverse suspension,” and it's exactly what it sounds like.

During a typical suspension, a child is required to stay home from school, ideally with his/her parent(s). But a “reverse suspension” does the complete opposite, giving the parent a chance to go to school with their child and stick by his/her side all day long.

“When we started combining schools we had a lot of kids getting in trouble and getting suspended,” So the school decided to offer “reverse suspension” as punishment for non-violent, non-verbally abusive behavior, and it's doing the trick.

“I was suspended multiple times last year. But this year, not once,” one student said.

Middle school is bad enough as it is. It's the beginning of the awkward years. During that time, what's worse than getting in trouble and having your mom by your side all day long? At school. In front of your friends. NOTHING!

“Who as a parent wants to sit in class? It's embarrassing,” said one parent “It's a good motivator to not have your parents come and sit with them.”

Since implementing the policy, the school has reduced suspensions by two-thirds and bad behavior by over half.

## **VI. JESUS RIGHT ALONGSIDE**

I can't help but picture Jesus, as he gathers in “his children” and shares all the advice he has with them and prays to God for them, as that Mother—walking down the halls of the school. Going to the locker, sitting in a desk in class, schlepping through the cafeteria line.

Sticking close. Saying, “Come on kids, let's get along. Work it out. Say you're sorry. Do your chores *together*. No fighting!! God gave me you kids, and you're going to make God proud, if it's the last thing I do!

Mother love, God's love, childrens' love for parents; brother and sister love—in all its expressions!

We bring all kinds of love to this day. This Mother's Day. Love of mother; love for mother. A longing for the comfort of a mother who has passed on. Grieving the loss of a child gone too soon. Or, hopes of motherhood thwarted. Seeking for the strength to forgive a mother who gave less than abundantly of the mother love we craved.

We bring gratitude for those in our past, present and future who seek to mother in more communal ways. Our church mothers and grandmothers; community nurturers. Mentors, adopted mothers and children – those who have become family to us beyond blood.

Those who came to school and stayed right alongside us to make sure we behaved! And still do!

Kept us on the path. Watched out for us and our antics. It takes a village.

From a Mother of the Church, Julian of Norwich in the 14th century. “Mothering God, you gave me birth. Mothering Christ, you took my form. Mothering Spirit, nurturing One.” God is always more than we imagined. God is always closer than we had dared to dream.

Happy Mother’s Day, may you be wrapped in the arms of Divine Love, wherever you find yourself on this day. Amen.