

“God Our Mother”

John 14:15-21

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From the Pulpit

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Let us pray: O Creator God, who gives us life, we thank You for the gift of Your Word – and the words that You place on each of our hearts. And may the words that I have to offer, here, this morning, please You and honor You and glorify Your holy name.

In Jesus’ name, amen!

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I’d like to begin this morning by acknowledging that today – Mother’s Day – comes with a lot of mixed feelings, doesn’t it?

While it certainly **IS** a day to celebrate and give thanks and recognize all the mothers and the mother figures of our lives, we also know that this day can be a *hard day* for many among us:

- including those among us whose mothers have died;
- or those who are experiencing declining health;
- and those for whom motherhood hasn’t been easy;
- and those for whom motherhood hasn’t been an option.

And so, here, in this sacred space that God has created among us *this* day, we honor and we bless **the truth** of each personal experience of motherhood and mothering on *this* Mother’s Day.

Now, it has been my experience as both a preacher – *and* as a woman – that the theme of Mother’s Day seems to have this way of inspiring or shaping my sermon on this day, and that is certainly true for **this** Sunday – on this Mother’s Day.

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Our Gospel reading this morning from John, chapter 14, is brief.

The language is intimate and the message is even mystical as Jesus describes this union – this holy union – this oneness – that he experiences in relation to God.

Now, just to go back, for a moment, to last week’s Gospel reading (that Rev. Tim read), you may recall that the tone and tenor of the Gospel of John has shifted by this point, and we have now entered into what is often referred to as the “Farewell Discourse” or the “Last Supper Discourse” (which takes place in chapters 14-17 in John).

And, as you may remember from last week, in that first section of this chapter (14), Jesus offers words of assurance to Thomas when Jesus says:

If you know me, you will know my father also. From now on, you DO know him and have seen him.

And then, again, soon thereafter, Jesus also speaks to Philip, rather sharply, when he says: *If you know me, you **will** know my Father also.*

Here, Jesus seems to be trying to get his disciples to understand that they are one in the same – God as Father and as Jesus.

And so, today, this “farewell discourse” – or this emotionally-charged tension, if you will, between Jesus and his disciples continues ...

And Jesus goes on to prepare them for when he will no longer be with them in his earthly form, and instead, Jesus promises that God will *still* be present with them to teach them – and encourage them – through the gift of the *Spirit of Truth*.

In our text today, from John 14, Jesus tells his disciples that God will give them – in his words – “another Advocate” or one who would be with them forever.

He then goes on to explain that the Advocate is the *Spirit of Truth*, the One who will **always** abide *with them* and *in them*.

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The word, *Advocate*, here, has been translated from the Biblical Greek word, paraKLEEtos – or *paraclete*. And a paraclete is defined as one who comforts, intercedes, aids, and consoles.

And so, it is in this story that Jesus promises his disciples – and all of us today – that the Paraclete or the Spirit of Truth – or what we now refer to as the Holy Spirit – will be with us forever.

As an aside, the traditional Trinitarian language – “God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit” – as church doctrine – wasn’t officially accepted until a few hundred years later (in 325 CE) at the Council of Nicea – but I love that here, in our reading today, Jesus is describing God as the Spirit of Truth.

God. *as*. Spirit.

God. **is**. Spirit.

And, in the Hebrew Scriptures – which Jesus knew inside and out – the Hebrew word for Spirit is *ruach* which is a feminine noun. And so, when *I* assign a gender to the Holy Spirit, it is often female.

In our reading from John today, we are given different names for God: *Father* and *Jesus* and *Advocate* and *Spirit of Truth*.

But on this Mother’s Day Sunday, it seems only fitting to lift up some of the other *maternal* images of God in the Bible ...

One of the common images is God as a mother bird sheltering her children under her wings.

We find this in the Old Testament, in Ruth 2, when Boaz says to Ruth:
May you be richly blessed under whose wings you have come to take refuge!

And again, in Matthew 23, when Jesus says to the crowds and his disciples:
O Jerusalem, how often I longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.

There are also Scriptural references to God as **mother**.

In Isaiah 42, the prophet calls out:

But now like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and I pant.

And, later on in Isaiah, in chapter 66, the prophet writes:

As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you.

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On this Mother's Day Sunday, no matter our gender or our parental status or what our experiences of mothering have – or have not – been, in our text today, we encounter a ***Mothering God*** – through the **intimate** presence that Jesus offers through his devotion and compassion and love – and deep, deep connection – to his followers then – and to us today.

In this reading from John 14, Jesus tells us:

On that day, you'll know that I am in God, and you are in me, and I am in you.

As Scripture teaches us, again and again, relating to God in a maternal role is nothing new!

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And so, I'd like to close this morning with a brief reflection written by Julian of Norwich who was a 14th c. Christian mystic.

It comes from her book, "Revelations of Divine Love," which is believed to have been the first book in English to be authored by a woman! As a theologian, Julian of Norwich is known for her extended comparison of God to a mother.

Julian wrote the following words:

It is thus logical that God, being our Father, be also our Mother.

Our Father desires, our Mother operates, and our good Lord the Holy Ghost confirms; that we are thus well advised to love God, through whom we have our being, to thank God reverently and to praise our Father for having created us, and to pray fervently to our Mother, so as to obtain mercy and compassion, and to pray to our Lord, the Holy Ghost, to obtain help and grace.

Thanks be to our Mothering God ... Amen!

