

Sermon
Rev. Steve Domienik

Easter 3
Year A Mothers Day
5-8-11
Luke 24:13-35

Road to Emmaus

In the name of the Creating God, the Nurturing God and the Sustaining God. AMEN

I want to begin by wishing everyone here a HAPPY MOTHER’S DAY! This greeting is extended to women and men alike.

Now some of you may be thinking, “What does Mother’s Day have to with the church anyway? Isn’t this just a secular holiday created by Hallmark to sell some cards?”

Even though Mother’s day is not an official feast recognized by the church, I believe that the tenets of this holiday are completely compatible with our faith. So this morning, I would like to explore with you some components of Mother’s Day that may already be found in our churches. I will also attempt to push the envelope a bit by expanding our thinking about the language and images that we use to describe these aspects in our faith and worship. Now this may sound strange to our ears, but please bear with me.

In the narrowest definition, we typically think of a mother as a woman who has given birth to a child. Fortunately, our understanding of mother has been expanded to include women who foster, adopt or care for others – physically, financially, emotionally or spiritually. Our definition of motherhood has also broadened to embrace the many nurturing qualities of women who act as surrogate mothers to a wide range of people and in many different circumstances.

In addition, the term mother is often used figuratively to describe people or things that exhibit the qualities associated with mothers, such as – “mother church or mother-land”. We even attribute the term mother to non-human things such as – “computer motherboards”, or when referring to deposits of minerals – “mother-load”, to institutions that spawn other organizations we use the more inclusive term – “parent company”, and mother is also used in a derogatory manner when placed in front of a certain expletive slang word.

But it is in the sense of birthing, the giving and nurturing of life that still commands much of our attention. This is truly the one instance in all of humanity that a single person comes as close to creating new life as is possible. I think it is also safe to say that this is probably the only thing that women cannot do alone – they have to have help and input from men. But after that initial assistance, women have to bear the burden of this birthing work, which includes all of the biological, emotional and spiritual changes as well as the

physical pain of pregnancy and childbirth. For these reasons, I know that women are the stronger gender!

Webster's dictionary defines mother as "that which gives birth to something, is the origin or source of something". Isn't this the same foundational understanding that we have of God? We believe that God is the source and originator of all life and that it is God who has given birth to the whole of creation! So with this definition is it fair to say that God is the mother of all things? Don't we come together to worship God every week at this our public liturgy? Would it then be a stretch to say that we celebrate God as mother every time we gather?

In addition, a foundational tenet of Christianity is that Jesus became incarnate in a human woman and was birthed just as the rest of us were. The incarnation would not have happened without a woman. Jesus was also dependent upon the care and nurturance of his mother for his survival and well-being and he probably developed his compassionate, caring, loving qualities because of her.

Another component typically associated with mothers is that of feeding. During pregnancy the mother has been feeding the baby through the umbilical cord but once this is cut the baby still derives its nourishment from the mother's breast. Granted, the manufacture of formula has changed some of the dynamics of feeding which allows men to participate, but the fact remains that only women have the ability to naturally feed their children. This seems to extend throughout our lifecycle – for example, how many of us here have encountered mothers or grandmothers that keep putting food in front of us saying, Eat, Eat, Eat!

We see throughout the Gospels that Jesus was heavily involved with feeding people as part of his ministry. The numerous food miracles as well as the numerous stories of Jesus sharing a meal and eating with sinners and tax collectors, highlights the importance of sustaining people with the food they need to survive.

The tradition and practice of Christianity that picks up on this fact is our celebration of the Eucharist. This ritual that we attend every week right here is also known as the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion. We believe that the bread and the wine are the body and blood of Christ, the heavenly food that sustains and nurtures us on this journey. By sharing in this meal, we become one with Christ and each other. In this core belief of our faith, Jesus becomes the surrogate mother who feeds and nurtures us.

We hear in our Gospel today about the two disciples who were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They had high hopes for their teacher, Jesus. They thought he was the long awaited for Messiah who would vanquish the Roman army from the land and restore Israel to freedom and prominence. But they saw how Jesus was arrested, tortured and executed. These events turned their whole world upside down. Confusion, doubt and despair followed them as they left the city to get away and try to figure things out.

Haven't all of us at some time or other, been face to face with painful experiences or problems in life which have challenged the foundations of our trust in God?

Can we recall those moments when we felt like all of life had been shattered for us? Can we remember those times when all our hopes and dreams had been erased? Hopeless, helpless, and hapless we stumble toward our home in dire need of shelter and security when the Easter Christ suddenly meets us.

Jesus comes when we least expect him, but when we are in deepest need of him. Jesus touches us in both head and heart; and Jesus reveals himself most deeply in simple relationships.

The two disciples had their dreams destroyed, and their hopes hurled down into that tomb with Jesus. There was nothing left to do but go home and make the most of a sorry situation.

But along the road they met a stranger who talked with them about the scriptures, and God's plan for humanity. This stranger was a non-anxious presence in the face of pain and struggle. The relationship that was quickly established gave them peace of mind and hope.

So the disciples offered him the gift of hospitality. They invited this stranger into their home and it was when this stranger took the simple gifts of bread and wine, blessed it and gave it to them that they recognized Jesus in their midst. This sharing again of the Eucharist opened their eyes as Jesus once again fed, nurtured and consoled them.

Jesus comforted, fed, listened to, supported and loved these disciples. Aren't these the same things that mothers strive to do for their children? Aren't all these traits Jesus has been displaying the motherly qualities that we have been speaking of?

Many more examples could be given as to how Jesus embodies the many characteristics we usually associate with mothers. The bottom line, however, seems to be that our celebration of Mother's and their importance for our survival is not only compatible but integral to our Christian faith and identity.

The problem of course, has been that Christianity was "born" in a patriarchal society, so we inherited male language, models, imagery and leadership that survived throughout the centuries to our present times. And the struggle to fully recognize, honor and integrate women, mothers and all those qualities typically associated with them into our society continues.

In our country and in our church we are certainly making progress toward including and acknowledging the contributions of women and mothers, but there is still a great deal of work to be done here and especially in other countries around the world.

What would happen if we challenged this pattern and celebrated the interconnectedness of our faith with all that is represented by mothers and motherhood every time we came to church? Would your personal faith be different? Would our communal activity take on new meaning? Would our language, behavior, understanding and worship be different? The remarkable stories of "Jesus sightings" after Easter are filled with strong, vivid images and language that stretch our imaginations and push us to see God in new and deeper ways.

So on this Mother's Day let us remember and acknowledge all of those gifts and skills that women around the globe from the beginning of time have shared with all of humanity. And just as those disciples engaged and accepted Jesus on the road to Emmaus, may we also be open to Jesus working in us as we journey through life.

And may we see the Risen Christ in all women and recognize all these mothering qualities within Jesus, ourselves and our church as we celebrate this Hallmark Holiday.

Happy Mother's Day!

AMEN