

Sermon for May 12, 2019
Mother's Day
"God's Love and a Mother's Love"

Psalm 23
John 10:11-18

Mother's Day was not invented by the greeting card companies. They certainly seem to have cashed in on it that is for sure; them and the florists and jewelers. But Mother's Day actually had more humble beginnings.

While holidays honoring mother's have existed all the way back to the ancient Greeks and probably farther, the modern American celebration was established by Anna Jarvis in the early 20th Century. Anna Jarvis's mother passed away on May 9, 1905. In 1907 she had a special service at Andrews Methodist Episcopal church in Grafton, WV remembering her mother. Out of this memorial service grew the idea of honoring and remembering mothers on the 2nd Sunday in May. Finally, in 1914, President Woodrow Wilson officially proclaimed Mother's Day a national holiday to be held on the second Sunday of May. But people were quick to cash in on the holiday. At one point Anna Jarvis even sued to stop a Mother's Day festival because they were openly marketing the sale of carnations which had become associated with the holiday.

The popularity of Mother's Day is informative. People love their mothers deeply and were quick to jump on the band wagon and are more eager to celebrate it than other similar holidays. Sure, we have a Father's Day and a Grandparent's Day and even a Brother and Sister Day, but Mother's Day was the first and the most popular. This popularity is, I think, a measure of how deeply people love their mothers.

People love their mothers deeply, because ideally a mother's love is so great. Consider what mothers go through. First there is child birth: that is no picnic. And once the child is born, most of the work of child rearing falls on the mothers. But studies show that even in two career families, force of habit places most of the burden on the mother. All that time and energy, for what? So that the child can leave.

There are times when a mother's love falls far short of this ideal. We are all familiar with cases of mothers abusing or neglecting their children. We often hear about such cases in the media. Some might argue that these cases negate the ideal. I would argue that we consider them so disturbing because the behavior of that small sample of mothers flies right in the face of the ideal.

Ideally a mother gives and gives and gives asking nothing in return. And no matter what happens, they still love. A person can commit an unspeakable crime and everyone will abandon that person, but their mother won't. Consider Mary, Jesus' mother. When almost everybody else fled in terror, who was one of the few at the foot of the cross: Mary, the mother of Jesus.

A mother's love is so unconditional and exceptional that it is in a category by itself. Some give it its own name. They call it "Motherlove." It is a degree of love that is only fully expressed by the love of a mother. It is the kind of love that persists no matter what wrong is done to it. Even among wild animals, a mother will give her life to save her offspring. So, people respond to that degree of love, with an equally fierce loyalty.

Jesus told us to call God "Father," but God's love is much like a mother's love. Julian of Norwich, a prominent Christian Mystic and theologian of the late 14th early 15th centuries, said, "As truly as God is our Father, so truly God is our Mother." The Bible is full of examples of God's "motherlove." The prophet Isaiah depicts God saying, "As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem."(66:13) Jesus paraphrasing one of the psalms

speaks of gathering the people of Jerusalem like a hen gathers her brood.(Matthew 23:37, Psalm 36:7) God is constantly feeding and nurturing God's children. God is the one who gave us life, who breathed us into existence, just as our mothers birthed us into this world. And God is constantly giving for our benefit. And God hurts when we walk away and reject love.

The image of God as Shepherd is a good example of this. God cares for us as a good shepherd. God provides for our every need. God takes us to green pastures and leads us beside still waters. And God protects us from wild animals that would devour us.

Like a mother, God prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies. When others would flee, God remains steadfast. A mother ideally stands by her child even though others ridicule, deride, and even crucify. And what is God doing in the face of our enemies? God is providing for our earthly needs by preparing a table for us.

Of course, God's love is greater than any love a human can produce. "Motherlove" is only an analogy that helps us understand God's love. But it's a good analogy. It helps us understand how loving and giving God is. The most unconditional example of human love is a Mother's love. To say that God loves us more than that at least gives us a frame of reference.

Jesus is the prime example of God's "Motherlove." In Jesus, God died for the children God created. The ultimate expression of love is to give one's life for another. (John 15:13) We see that expressed when a mother risks her life to save her child. Just giving birth to a child can be a risk. Child birth can still be dangerous but before the advent of modern medicine childbirth was a leading cause of death among women. Jesus is the Son of God, but even he tells us that he and the Father are one. When the Father sent Jesus to die on the cross, God was sending God's self to suffer and die. Like a mother, Jesus was unselfishly giving his life so that his children could live.

The amazing thing is Jesus died for humanity even though we rejected him. God's love in Christ loved even though people spat upon him and cursed him. One might think that the God of the universe would squash people for doing that, but God's love is unconditional and does not depend on us loving God back. We can reject God, and God hurts, but like a mother's love God's love continues.

Paul preached about this love. He said, "Though they could charge him with nothing deserving death, yet they asked Pilot to have him killed." And yet God sent the human race the good news of the resurrection that we might repent and live. (Acts 13:26-33) That is love! God could have condemned us once we killed Jesus, but instead God sent Paul and others to try to proclaim liberation. God continues to love the human race even though we rejected and mistreated Jesus, God in the flesh. God loves us even though we do the same.

The problem is that many don't know this aspect of God's love. Some mistakenly think God is vengeful or mean. God is righteous, and God seeks justice. But it is more like the punishment that a loving mother gives a child. Its purpose is to keep the children safe. A mother punishes a child for playing with matches, not to be mean, but so that the child doesn't burn herself.

The greatest quality of God is God's love and God's forgiving spirit. Ideally a mother will always love her child no matter how evil they get. God will always love God's children no matter what we do. God loves us even though we reject and hurt. Even though we crucify the Son daily with our sin, God still loves us. And God sent us the good news of that love.

Love God! Why? For the same reason you love your mother. God gave us life. God loves us, and Jesus gave his life for us. Like the martyrs of old, let us decide to love back by giving our whole lives to God.

You would die for your mother? Why not be willing to die for God? More importantly, why not be willing to live for God?