

Happy Mothering Day  
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John 15:9-17 (The Message, adapted)

<sup>9-10</sup> “I’ve loved you the way my MOTHER has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. If you keep my commands, you’ll remain intimately at home in my love. That’s what I’ve done—kept my MOTHER’S commands and made myself at home in HER love.

<sup>11-15</sup> “I’ve told you these things for a purpose: that my joy might be your joy, and your joy wholly mature. This is my command: Love one another the way I loved you. This is the very best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends. You are my friends when you do the things that I command you. I’m no longer calling you servants because servants don’t understand what their master is thinking and planning. No, I’ve named you friends because I’ve let you in on everything I’ve heard from the MOTHER.

<sup>16</sup> “You didn’t choose me, remember; I chose you, and put you in the world to bear fruit, fruit that won’t spoil. As fruit bearers, whatever you ask the MOTHER in relation to me, SHE gives you.

<sup>17</sup> “But remember the root command: Love one another.

1 John 5:1-6 (The Message, adapted)

<sup>1-3</sup> Every person who believes that Jesus is, in fact, the Messiah, is God-born. If we love the One who conceives the child, we’ll surely love the child who was conceived. The reality test on whether or not we love God’s children is this: Do we love God? Do we keep Her commands? The proof that we love God comes when we keep His commandments, and they are not at all troublesome.

<sup>4-5</sup> Every God-born person conquers the world’s ways. The conquering power that brings the world to its knees is our faith. The person who wins out over the world’s ways is simply the one who believes Jesus is the Son of God.

<sup>6</sup> Jesus—the Divine Christ! He experienced a life-giving birth and a death-killing death. Not only birth from the womb, but baptismal birth of his ministry and sacrificial death. And all the while the Spirit is confirming the truth, the reality of God’s presence at Jesus’ baptism and crucifixion, bringing those occasions alive for us.

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Would it surprise you to know that Easter is the most “popular” or “well-attended” day in the year? Probably not. Ok, then would it surprise you to know that Christmas is NOT the second most “popular” or “well-attended” day in the church year, but rather it’s Mother’s Day? Yes, Mother’s Day.

The American incarnation of Mother’s Day evolved during the 19<sup>th</sup> century from various women and motivations. “Mother’s Day Work Clubs” were created in West Virginia to teach women how to properly care for children. Then a “Mothers’ Friendship Day,” was promoted following the Civil War where mothers gathered with former Confederate and Union soldiers in order to promote reconciliation. In 1870 Julia Ward Howe wrote the “Mother’s Day Proclamation,” a call to action that asked mothers to unite in promoting world peace. There were several other women in other

parts of America who sponsored or promoted local “Mother’s Days”, often with a focus on social activist work. It was Anna Jarvis, an unmarried and childless woman, who wanted to both honor her mother and promote female-achievements, who was able to successfully get “Mother’s Day” to become an official U.S. holiday in 1914 after beginning annual “Mother’s Day” celebrations at her local Methodist Church and enlisting the help of a local retail store.

Despite it’s good and honorable intentions, Mother’s Day, as a holiday can be contentious and difficult for many people for many reasons. In America, Mother’s Day traditionally involves presenting moms with flowers, cards, and other gifts, as well as families gathering for a Sunday meal after attending church. Because of the immediate commercialization of the holiday, Jarvis herself rallied against the profiteers who she felt dishonored the holiday for mothers.<sup>1</sup>

Today, many people struggle with the holiday because of personal reasons such as the loss of a child or parent; neglect, abandonment or abuse by a parent, or the inability to have children. Some feel that Mother’s Day is too limiting or exclusive by not appreciating or appropriately honoring alternative families created by marriage, adoption, surrogacy or simply choice. The reality in today’s American society is that Mother’s Day has been redefined and expanded beyond gender and biological lineage.

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“Celebrations of mothers and motherhood can be traced back to the ancient Greeks and Romans, who held festivals in honor of the mother goddesses Rhea and Cybele, but the clearest modern precedent for Mother’s Day is the early Christian festival known as “Mothering Sunday.” Once a major tradition in the United Kingdom and parts of Europe, this celebration fell on the fourth Sunday in Lent and was originally seen as a time when the faithful would return to their “mother church”—the main church in the vicinity of their home—for a special service.”

From a religious perspective, I like the idea of reframing the Mother’s Day and Father’s Day holidays as “Mothering Sunday” or “Fathering Sunday;” not for the purpose of returning to a specific geographic house of worship, but certainly for celebrating a special worship service, one that focuses on a Godly sense of “mothering” and “fathering,” because THAT, is what truly happens and what is celebratory. Mother’s Day is not merely a holiday or celebration for females who have procreated offspring, but rather for honoring and celebrating a person’s choice “to mother” ... “To create an environment that’s stimulating and nurturing, to pass on a sense of responsibility to another human being, to raise a child who understands that he or she is created from good and is capable of anything...”<sup>2</sup>

When we hear the scripture from John’s gospel today, it’s the VERBS along **with** the NOUNS that speak and tell of not just God, but Godly Love – “God-ing” if you will. Jesus teaches us about a mother who mothers, a father who fathers, a friend who friends and God who Gods. All of it is rooted in love.

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As Jesus is speaking in today’s reading, it won’t be long before he will be arrested and crucified. The disciples will experience trauma, extreme sorrow, and anger. And LOVE will be very, VERY hard to focus on or even offer. Jesus is preparing them by teaching them of a mothering love.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.history.com/topics/holidays/mothers-day>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.oprah.com/relationships/oprah-on-motherhood#ixzz6uCakobsz>

“I have loved you the way my MOTHER has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. (*My mothering love*). If you keep my commands, you’ll remain intimately at home in my love. (*In my mothering love*). That’s what I’ve done—kept my MOTHER’S commands and made myself at home in HER love. (*God’s mothering love*).”

Now I know that some of you struggle or dislike references of God in the feminine form and changing pronouns for God in scripture, but I ask that you be gracious and focus on the VERB of God, and not the NOUN of God.

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Today scripture readings talk about love – AGAIN. Yes, again. It’s seems like we’re always talking about love when we’re in church. Love God. Love your neighbor. Love yourself. Love, love, love. You know, what? Love can be hard! It’s not easy. We get it wrong, a lot. We think we understand love, only to learn that we really don’t know much. Yet.... we keep trying...and we keep talking about it.

In scripture, love is described with adjectives. *Love is patient, love is kind*. Love is explained with verbs. *Love as I have loved you*. Love is symbolized with nouns. *I am the way, the truth and the life. No one get to the Father except through me*. I am LOVE. LOVE is the way. It’s all about LOVE.

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I can hear my mother’s voice:

“If I’ve told you once, I’ve told you twice...”

“How many times do I have to tell you...”

“Don’t make me say it again.”

This is probably your mother’s voice also, right? There were things that she just HAD to say over and over ... so that we *might* get it, so that we’d learn, and it’d sink in...she hoped.

Jesus is mothering. He repeats and repeats and repeats. He explains, re-explains and then ... patiently, explains again. Why? Because it bears repeating. Because we need to hear ... again, and again and again.

Another thing I remember my mother saying was,

“I’m not asking you, I’m telling you...”

I’d usually hear that when I fully understood what she was saying, but I was trying to manipulate my response or weasel-out of doing what I was told.

Jesus mothers the disciples, “This is my command.” He doesn’t request or ask them to love one another – he COMMANDS it! If you love me, if you love God ... then LOVE one another. Period.

When Jesus is talking to the disciples about love, yes – he describes all the great aspects of it. He tells us that his purpose is for his joy to be our joy. His relationship with God – the “God-ing” that Jesus knows and that Jesus is ... is FOR all of us to experience and IN all of us to share. Love one another as I have loved you, with a mothering love, because this is the best love – a whole love – a mature and joyful love.

But Jesus doesn’t hide the reality of just how difficult love is. “Put your life on the line for your friends.” YOUR LIFE. Isn’t that a mothering thing to do – sacrifice yourself for your child, for those you love. Jesus tells them

that they are no longer servants but friends. Jesus has shared “everything he’s heard,” about love....from God. They no longer *just* follow orders, but they are active, fully aware, participants, with choices. They get to know ALL about love – the easy parts AND the hard parts.

In Exodus, when the Hebrews were enslaved in Egypt, the Pharaoh had decreed all Hebrew baby boys be killed—thrown into the Nile River. Moses’ mothered him so lovingly that she chose to put him in a basket in the river, not knowing if he’d live or die, but hoping that he would live. While we’re not told of others, I’m sure that she wasn’t the only parent who had to mother in such a hard way.

In the story of the prodigal son, think about how that scenario would play out today...if you were in it. An arrogant, reckless, and disobedient child takes his share and runs off to do “God knows what, God knows where.” He squanders it all in no time and comes crawling back to you. How easy is it to not just forget everything he did, but also welcome him back with fine clothes, a great job and one heck of a party? It’s probably hard to do. But if we commit to accepting Jesus’ commandment to love – love as God loves us – then it becomes easier.

We all face the hard part of love daily when we engage people in public and on social media. There are conservatives, liberals, evangelicals, rioters, police, peace marchers, politicians and preachers --- many of whom claim to be Christians, who say that they believe and follow the way of Jesus Christ – the way of LOVE. They’re a Christian, you’re a Christian. How “easy” is that for us to believe? Often, it’s hard.

It’s the kind of love that calls us to LOVE George Floyd AND Derek Chauvin. I guarantee you that God loves them both. From today’s second reading in 1 John, “The reality test on whether or not we love God’s children is this: Do we love God?” If we love God, we love God’s children. It’s God’s Love, Jesus’ example that helps us to call on that “mothering – parental” kind of love...when LOVING others may be hard or difficult.

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We are chosen.

Jesus said, ““You didn’t choose me, remember; I chose you, and put you in the world to bear fruit, fruit that won’t spoil.”

Jesus reminds us that the mothering love we receive and deserve is purposeful, not accidental. We weren’t “*just born*.” You and I are here intentionally – created by God, in the womb, before any human thought of us ever occurred. We are chosen to bear good fruit. The good fruit that we get to bear is love. Right here, right now we get to be mothered and to mother. Because we are chosen by God we don’t have to wonder whether or not we **should** be here, we **are meant** to be here, or **are we worthy** to be here. We have been chosen – by God – to LOVE.

Happy Mothering Day – to us all.

AMEN.