

Mother's Day Sermon 2024

St. Luke/San Lucas, Vancouver WA

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26; Psalm 1; 1 John 5:9-13; John 17:6-19

May the words of my mouth,

And the meditation of all our hearts,

Be acceptable in your sight,

O Lord, our Creator and our Sustainer.

Amen.

When I was growing up, our church celebrated Mother's Day in a big way. Lots of flowers, plants and gift baskets. There were take-home prizes for the oldest mother present, for the youngest mother present, for the mother with the most children, for the mother with the youngest child. There was a special award for the family with the most generations represented. We always had four generations, occasionally had five, and on one momentous occasion, we even had six generations of one family in attendance—they took home a big gift basket that day. I don't remember anything about the sermons, but the gift presentation is burned into my brain. It was a lot, definitely over the top.

At the other end of the spectrum, I have also experienced the "we don't celebrate Mother's Day here." Not in the liturgy. Made up holiday. Doesn't belong in the church, and definitely not in the pulpit. Exclusionary. Let's preach about Ascension instead.

So, as I began preparing today's sermon, I found myself searching for a different approach. A via media. An inclusive way to recognize mothers. As often when I find myself stuck, I go back to the basics, in this case, the dictionary.

The first definition of motherⁱ, not surprisingly, is a noun. A woman who has produced offspring, a female parent. A woman who originates or creates something. All these definitions were very gendered, very limiting.

The second definition of mother is as an adjective, a descriptor. Mother Hubbard, Mother Goose, Mother Necessity.

But then there comes the third definition, as a verb. To mother. To be the origin or source. To care for, protect, nurture. Not gendered. All inclusive. Dependent on the choices we make, the actions we take, not on something external to ourselves. This looks more promising.

“While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them.” These words come from our gospel today. Jesus spoke these words to describe how he cared for his disciples, and how he instructed them—and us—to care for each other.

We are to nurture each other. We are to love each other. We are to protect each other. We are to share our goods with each other. We are to become family, parents, siblings, to each other. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as God for Christ’s sake, has forgiven us. Pray for each other. Let there be no divisions among us but be perfectly united in mind and thought. Share our burdens and our joy. We are all, each and every one of us, to mother those in our community. To nurture them. To love them, just as Jesus loves us.

The Rev. Grethe Barber, when she was giving those of us information advice on preaching, said to always leave people with an ask, something they can focus on over the next week, something practical and immediate they can do. And today, I’m going to give you two.

First, I’d like to ask each of you to spend a few minutes this week thinking about those individuals in your life who have nurtured you, who have provided strength and guidance and, yes, love. This may be a relative, a parent, a sibling, an aunt or uncle, a cousin. Or someone unrelated who stepped up and provided what you needed at a moment in your life.

This week, a close friend of mine, Ambassador Judith Garber, died. Judy was the senior trade officer when I was assigned as junior trade officer. She could have given me all the menial jobs. She could have taken all the credit for our work (others certainly had). But Judy was different. A practicing Jew, Judy lived her faith. She taught me how to be a good officer. She provided opportunities for me to practice, to grow in my professional skills. She provided encouragement and always, always highlighted my accomplishments. Over the nearly thirty years of our relationship, professional and personal, over the course of multiple different assignments, Judy was always supportive, nurturing, and above all, kind.

Once you have identified your person or, if you have been blessed, that list of people, who have nurture you, supported you, mothered you, spend a moment giving thanks for them. Say a short prayer of thanksgiving. If possible, send them a note, an email, maybe a thank you cookie or flowers. Just a small acknowledgement of the role they have played in your life.

Second, think about someone in your life, in your community, that you can mother, that you can nurture and support. Someone who could use a kind word, a bit of encouragement. And take action. Send that note. Provide that helping hand. Reach out and connect. Show them love as God has loved us.

And why do we do these things? Because Jesus told us to, yes, but also so that, as our gospel says, we may have Jesus' joy made complete in us. Jesus wants us to experience joy, and to share that joy with each other. So, this Mother's Day, let us begin to share that joy by acknowledging those who have nurtured us, and by reaching out to nurture those around us who are in need.

Amen.

ⁱ www.dictionary.com/mother