

SERMON, 5 Easter Yr A, Mother's Day, 5/14/2017
Christ Episcopal Church Sei Ko Kai, San Francisco
The Rev. Debra Low-Skinner

Growing up in the 1950s and 60s, near here in Chinatown on Pacific Avenue, I was a latchkey kid. This meant I went straight home after school and stayed there until Mom came home from work. This also meant I spent time watching a lot of TV. Not surprisingly, my understanding of American (i.e., Caucasian) mothers was gleaned from seeing TV situation comedies. I watched "I Love Lucy", "The Donna Reed Show", "Leave It to Beaver", "Father Knows Best", "The Brady Bunch", "Bewitched", and even "Lassie" (remember Timmy had a mom, too!).

Those mothers were beautiful, always wore make up, shirtwaist dresses, and sometimes a string of pearls around their necks. They were homemakers—meaning they stayed home and didn't work outside the home. They cooked, cleaned, washed and ironed clothes, raised the children, had dinner on the table, was everyone's shoulder to cry on, and tucked the kids into bed every night with a kiss on their foreheads. These moms seemed perfect, happy, with never a hair out of place as they vacuumed or baked cookies. They were always available to their husbands and children, because (unlike the name of the TV show) it was really Mom who always knew best. Furthermore, in those families, no one yelled at each other.

These mothers bore no resemblance to my mother (or perhaps your mother, too?). My mom was divorced three times and raised five kids on her own. She worked and tried to make ends meet on a meagre GS-5 clerk typist job in the Medical Records Dept. of the VA Hospital west of here at Fort Miley. While our home was generally well kept, and we always had food on the table, a roof over our heads, and clothes she sewed on our backs, Mom did her best to juggle things while never wearing a string of pearls. (She did wear a gold chain around her neck with a big jade heart pendant.) Mom also did a lot of yelling, as she vented her frustrations and unhappiness.

Real life is messy, imperfect, stressful, fraught with ups & downs and disasters & lucky breaks. This is because real human beings aren't perfect and don't lead perfect TV situation comedy lives. There aren't always happy endings, with things neatly tied up and resolved when the show is over.

Regardless, we take a momentary break today, this Mother's Day, to celebrate mothers: our real-life mothers, grandmothers, godmothers, and those who have loved and nurtured us as a mother would. We honor and give thanks to you, if you are a mother, expectant mother, stepmother, or motherly caregiver of children or a frail elderly parent.

Accordingly, I want to turn our attention to Julian of Norwich, whose feast day in the Episcopal calendar was last week on May 8th. She lived in the 14th century during the horrific plague years, when the Black Death claimed ¼-1/3 the population of Europe. She lived as an anchorite, meaning she led a solitary life in a room attached to St. Julian's Parish in Norwich. When she was about 30, she suffered from a serious ailment and was so close to death that she received

the Last Rites. Then, in one day, she had fifteen divine revelations (also called “showings”) and miraculously recovered. Some years later, she wrote down a description of her showings. This became a book called “Revelations of Divine Love”, that was the first book written in the English language by a woman.

If you haven’t read before any of Julian’s writings, which include allusions to God and Jesus Christ as “our Mother”, these may sound bizarre and perhaps proto-feminist. But keep an open mind as I read to you from St. Julian:

“So Jesus Christ, who sets good against evil, is our real Mother. We owe our being to him—and this the essence of motherhood—and all the delightful loving protection which ever follow. God is really our Mother as he is our Father.”

“Our Savior is our true Mother in whom we are endlessly born and out of whom we shall never come.”

“Because of the knowledge of (God’s) love, ... (and that) God is everything that is good (and) all life’s pleasures and comforts are sacramental. (And these good things) are God’s hands touching us.”

“When we fall, God quickly lifts us up, leaping out into our lives, like a mother playing peek-a-boo with her child, reassuring they baby with her touch.”

And then there is Julian’s most well-known quote, “All shall be well. And all shall be well. And all manner of thing shall be well.” This so like what every mother says to her child who is crying, “There, there. You’re all right. You’re all right. Everything’s going to be OK.”

When we consider that most of our early experiences of love, of being cared for and protected, of being nurtured and fed, of being accepted as we are as beloved children, all these come from our real mothers (or from a loving presence in our life who was motherly).

By extension, when we act loving, strong, and wise toward our children, or other children, or even adults, when we incarnate Christ’s love and extend it to others, that is how they come to experience a loving God, a God who is Mother and Father of us all.

Quoting Julian again: “Jesus wants us to understand...first, that he Himself is our ground, the soil from which we grow, the foundation on which we are built. ... His presence is always with us, and His loving gaze never wavers, for He wants us to turn back to Him to be united with Him in Love.”

Finally, from yesterday’s Deanery Meeting Morning Prayer service, I would like us all to recite “A Song of True Motherhood” that incorporates the mothering spirit of St. Julian of Norwich (By the way, you will note in Julian’s picture in the front of our bulletin that she does not wear a string of pearls!):

A Song of True Motherhood *(Julian of Norwich)*

God chose to be our mother in all things
and so made the foundation of this work,
most humbly and most pure, in the virgin's womb.
God, the perfect wisdom of all,
was arrayed in this humble place.
Christ came in our poor flesh
to share a mother's care.
Our mothers bore us for pain and for death;
our true mother, Jesus, bears us for joy and endless life.
Christ carried us within him in love and travail,
until the full time of his passion.
And when all was completed
and he had carried us so for joy,
still all this could not satisfy
the power of his wonderful love.
All that we owe is redeemed in truly loving God;
for the love of Christ works in us;
Christ is the one whom we love.

Glory to God, Source of all being, Eternal Word, and Holy Spirit
as it was in the beginning, is now and will be for ever. Amen

