

Mother and Child Reunion
Rev: Gusti Linnea Newquist
May 9, 2021
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

Based on 1 John 4:19 – 5:3. Loving God Means Loving Our Siblings

(translation below)

I begin today with an apology to the Eastertide Worship Planning Team, who expressly and vigorously requested that I focus on the motherhood of God, rather than on our sometimes all too human experience of motherhood.

I agree with the sentiment.

Human motherhood can be fraught, even on this day of celebration. Especially in a global pandemic whose economic impact on mothers has been brutal.

And motherhood is messy. Literally. Filled with poop and puke and a truly torturous lack of sleep. Much less the constant guilt of never doing enough, or doing too much, or not even knowing what we are supposed to be doing in the first place.

Even the best mothers make mistakes. Not to mention some mothers who really never should have been mothers at all.

And then there are those who are desperate to be mothers and cannot or will not.

Of course we should focus on the motherhood of God, as the Eastertide Worship Planning Team insisted, because, as one of them said, “You just never know what people are dealing with on Mother’s Day.”

And yet ...

In the Christian tradition we look to Jesus in order to find out who God is, including God the Mother. And, while the tradition argues long and hard about how Jesus was fathered, there is no debate that Jesus “came into the world in the usual way”: gestating for nine months in the body of his mother.

This is, scholars say, a primary reason the first letter of John is written. To insist on a physical human Jesus, born of a physical human mother.

In our twenty-first century, post-Enlightenment worldview this seems like a no-brainer. We do not have any problem with the *humanity* of Jesus. It is his *divinity* we struggle with sometimes. But in the community of First John, the opposite is true. Some in the community are beginning to believe that the Jesus who walked on this earth is pure spirit, only *appearing* to be human. And our job as the followers of Jesus is to, in some sense, transcend our humanity, transcend our physicality, becoming, ourselves, “pure spirit.”

First John insists otherwise.

The physical human Jesus is born of a physical human mother, First John insists. Just like the physical us. And the only way we can learn how to love God and neighbor is *through* this physical human experience. Not by transcending it.

There is morning sickness, for example. Maybe high blood pressure. Preeclampsia, perhaps. The water of the mother of Jesus breaks and labor pains ensue, without (we think) the benefit of an epidural. There is blood and excrement and an umbilical cord. And the first cry of life, as the physical human miracle of creation continues! As the human condition carries on, one generation to the next. Physical human birth after physical human birth after physical human birth.

And the story continues.

Jesus is not the only child of his mother. There are siblings. And rivalries. In Mark's Gospel there is even a break-up of the family unit.

Which might make us feel a bit better about the struggles of our own all too human, physical, families to live together in peace. I remember well one Thanksgiving dinner filled with infighting among my own siblings. Even as adults! Worse as adults! And our Mother literally crying, "Peace! Peace! Peace!" For all of her children, whom she loves equally, who all claim to love her. Begging us to just stop fighting and sit together at the table, piled high with abundance, and feast on the goodness she had prepared.

We could not do it.

Not just us, not just one physical human family on one Thanksgiving holiday, but we *homo sapiens* in this physical, miraculous creation of *all* species, birthed by our common Mother, we cannot seem to do it.

The "one House Rule our Mother God insists upon," according to the first letter of John, is that we care for the well-being of the entire family. "That we labor for what is best for all of our siblings."

The truth is, if we really are going to focus on the motherhood of God on this Mother's Day Sunday, we have to confess that our common Mother God feels something like my physical human mother crying, "Peace! Peace! Peace!" among grown up human, plant, and animal children who refuse to sit together at her table of abundance.

If God really is our Mother – and she most emphatically *is* – than God is literally giving her body for the well-being of the *world*. Not just *homo sapiens*, mind you, but the grass and the trees and the rivers, the cows and the sheep and the Arias, the birds and the bats and maybe even the coronaviruses.

If God really is our common Mother, then God is pleading with us who claim to love her to finally figure out how to live in peace with one another, caring and laboring for the well-being of one another, so we can feast together on the goodness God has prepared.

It is fairly simple, says First John. Not at all "burdensome" in the New Revised Standard Version translation.

We just have to get over ourselves as the end all be all of our Mother God's womb.

And we have to try again.

So pick one sibling on this Mother's Day Sunday – one physical human, plant, or animal sibling, for whose well-being you have not been laboring in love – and try again.

And pick another one tomorrow and try again.

Day after day, pick another sibling, honoring our Mother God by laboring for the well-being of all creation, our siblings, as Jesus did. Which is the only House Rule that matters in the end.

"I would not give you false hope," sings the great musician Paul Simon, on what is, at least for me, "this strange and mournful day."

But maybe, just maybe, if we keep coming back to House Rule Number One, according to the First Letter of John, "the Mother and Child reunion is only a moment away."

Let the church say, Amen!

John 4:19 – 5:3

First and foremost, God labors for what is best for us.

*Because of this, we also have the capacity
to labor for what is best for all creation:
our siblings who share a common Mother.*

*If we say we love God, whom we cannot see,
but do not labor for what is best for all creation –
the siblings we do see all around us,
who share a common Mother –
we are lying.*

*There is, in fact, only one House Rule our Mother God insists upon:
that we labor for what is best for all of our siblings.
This is the only Mother's Day gift that matters to God.*

*Jesus, the Anointed One among us,
shows us how to live as God's Beloved Children:
honoring our Mother by laboring for the well-being of all creation,
the only House Rule that really matters.*

It is that simple.