

Easter 4C: 5/12/19
The Rev. Dee Anne Dodd
St. Paul's, Wallingford CT

I truly hope you're having a wonderful day today.
It is, after all, Mother's Day –
not a religious holiday, mind you, but a secular one.
A secular holiday we tend to acknowledge, nevertheless.
We don't schedule events after church on Mother's Day
(or Father's Day, for that matter), and we make a point
to include them in our prayers.
So, good for us.
But what we probably don't do enough
is admit that it's, well, *complicated*.

For everyone who gets a Hallmark card today,
there's someone else who'll wait in vain for a call . . . or a text . . .
or anything.
For everyone celebrating with a full house this Mother's Day,
there's another spending the day alone, or without her child.
Maybe her child is far away. Or estranged.
Or, God help us, deeply mourned.

Or what about us who miss our own mothers,
who long for just one more glimpse of them in this life?
Or those who long to be a mother?

For these and a hundred other often unspoken reasons,
Mother's Day (and Father's Day too) can be more complicated
than we like to admit.

So if you're blessed to have an unambiguously happy Mother's Day,
we thank God right along with you.
Savor every second –
just like Mary, mother of Jesus, treasured in her heart
every aspect of his life.

But if today is for you more bittersweet, or downright difficult,

that's life too.

Please know you're not alone.

By the grace of God we're in this together,
to walk beside each other wherever we are on life's journey.

For whatever the secular calendar may say,
we're here to observe Good Shepherd Sunday,
always the Fourth Sunday of Easter.

We celebrate that Jesus is the one who cares most for us,
who comforts and leads us, who nurtures us;
and who shows us how to care for one other.

Many years ago –
soon after I lost my own mother,
and just before I became a mother myself –
the musician Bobby McFerrin composed a version of the 23rd Psalm.
Dedicated to his mother,
it's sometimes called a feminine version of that psalm.

Not that God is solely feminine, any more than God is solely masculine.
Those human categories are way too small, too limited, for the Divine.
God is like a selfless, devoted, loving mother,
and yet far more selfless, more devoted and more loving
than the dearest human mother.
God is like the best of any human father, yet far surpasses that.

No one single image can possibly capture the fullness of God's glory.
But opening ourselves up to many different ways of understanding God
can help us begin to fathom the unfathomable,
and grow in our experience of God.
It can help us grow closer to God.

Yes, Jesus often referred to God as Father;
and in today's Gospel says that he and the Father are one.
But Jesus also refers to God in other ways too,
and even describes himself as a mother hen
to help his listeners understand just how tenderly he cares for them.

To let them know that he longs to gather them under his protective, *maternal* wings.

I'm guessing that Bobby McFerrin learned something of this aspect of God from his mother.
Perhaps he was doubly blessed to experience something of God from his father too.
God knows we need all the help we can get to accept ourselves as children of God – freely loved, and freely giving of love.

This Mother's Day, this Good Shepherd Sunday, receive the gift of the 23rd Psalm as dedicated to Bobby McFerrin's mother . . .

[played through the sound system and printed on bulletin inserts]

*The Lord is my Shepherd, I have all that I need,
She makes me lie down in green meadows,
Beside the still waters, She will lead.*

*She restores my soul, She rights my wrongs,
She leads me in a path of good things,
And fills my heart with songs.*

*Even though I walk, through a dark & dreary land,
There is nothing that can shake me,
She has said She won't forsake me,
I'm in her hand.*

*She sets a table before me, in the presence of my foes,
She anoints my head with oil,
And my cup overflows.*

*Surely, surely goodness & kindness will follow me,
All the days of my life,
And I will live in her house,
Forever, forever & ever.*

*Glory to our Mother, & Daughter,
And to the Holy of Holies,
As it was in the beginning, is now & ever shall be,
World, without end. Amen.*

AMEN.

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