

Easter 5B; Mother's Day

Lections: Acts 8:26-40; Ps. 22:24-30; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8

Insert from 1870, Julia Ward Howe's Proclamation for a Mother's Day

Today's prayers of the people are woven into the sermon.

I was once a member of a group of clergy and psychologists whose goal was to make good connections between the professions. At that time clinicians were distrustful of clergy, thinking that religious ideation was part of so many psychiatric illnesses and the clergy were unsure of when to refer people for help or how the therapeutic community might benefit those who were depressed and anxious. We were asked to draw images of our structures as a way of insight. I drew a womb with child, placenta and umbilical cord imagining the cord much the way Jesus speaks of the vine and its connections in today's gospel. I saw the child as contained in the "One in whom we live, move and have our being." I saw the church as the cord, delivering the life-giving nutrients from God. As the mother of three daughters I liked the embodied image and I was reflecting on the "mother church" in the words of the Easter Vigil exultet. As a newly ordained priest I wanted to concentrate my energies on what I believe is a life giving relationship in community.

The vine image Jesus uses in today's gospel challenges our contemporary standards about individual achievement and success; to be successful as a religious community we need to stay connected, not cutting the umbilical cord. A grape vine winds its branches together in an intimate way so that it is strong and productive; like an umbilical cord, connectedness is related to vitality. Some of us learned about God and the world through our mothers; others, not so much. Perhaps you wrote about what you learned from your mothers on the wisdom papers wrapped on our entry pillars. Many of the sayings recorded are about connections, relationships:

Share with each other

Be kind and understanding to all

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you

Be nice to everyone

Walk a mile in someone else's shoes before you judge them

Love your neighbor; everyone is your neighbor

Look outside yourself and see the needs of others – if possible, help

Welcome all; make sure there is enough food

Show hospitality to everyone

For our prayers we shall use the phrase "Blessed are the peacemakers", to which the response is "for they shall be called the children of God."

We pray for the leaders of the nations that they may use their resources wisely for the education, health and well being of children and families.

We pray for mothers whose children serve in our armed forces that their children never see battle and for mothers whose children volunteer in peace keeping organizations.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

Today's honoring of biological mothers, some call a Hallmark holiday, was suggested by Annie Jarvis whose efforts made it a national cultural holiday. The first proposal for a Mother's Day came in a proclamation given in 1870 by Julia Ward Howe who had written "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." She wanted a day of peace, a day when the women of the world would come together to declaim violence. She called for an international women's conference, a hope that emerged from her faith in the golden rule, do unto others as you would have them do unto you. She reflected some of the practical advice some of you listed on the mother's wisdom pillars:

Attend church
Stay fit
Write clearly and legibly
You have a tongue in your head – use it
Love music and song

Her call to assemble for peace failed; energy was high for the women's suffrage movement. She felt deeply connected to other mothers and their children and she did not want the teachings of mothers to be lost, especially when she believed that it was mothers who taught their sons and daughters to have compassion and mercy, to live in generosity toward others.

We pray for the mothers of victims of gang-related violence and we pray for the mothers of gang members.

We pray for our police officers and prison guards and wardens everywhere, that they treat every mother's son or daughter as they would wish to be treated themselves.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

We pray for our connections in the Anglican cycle of prayer, in our diocesan relationships, and for those in need in this parish.....

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

Someone has said that bearing fruit doesn't create disciples but bearing fruit reveals disciples. We see that in our first scripture today from Acts when Philip crosses lines of difference to come into relationship with the stranger from Ethiopia. Love became a verb for him as he moved toward the 'other' in relationship, in companionship. The branches of the vine were connected in talking, listening and asking questions, risking new territory, becoming one with another in baptism. Tradition has it that Christian faith in Ethiopia prospered as a result of this time on the road.

We pray for our mothers-in-law or mothers of our partners, for they have loved the children who now love us.

We pray for all mothers whose children have gone astray, who can't find the words to reach them.

We pray for all the mothers who sat down with their children and explained all about how babies are made – and for the mothers who wanted to but just couldn't.

We pray for the wisdom to teach our children by our example not to bully, scorn or persecute those who are different from us.

Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.

Yesterday the parish council began an intentional focus on its leadership roles for the coming year. We learned a little more about each other, our individual gifts, many of them relational, as we strengthen the whole. We are also reminded that the strength and witness of this community is its power to abide in God's love. The best grapes are apparently those closest to the vine so we encouraged each other in faith as we step into the next opportunities. We are dependent on the vine of Jesus – our vitality, our permanence, our witness – reflect on our abiding in him in love.

We pray for ourselves, that we can forgive our mothers for their mistakes, and that our mothers and children will forgive us ours.

And we pray for any woman, mother or not, who is unsafe in her own home, whose partner or husband threatens or brutalizes, and beats her down in body and spirit – that she would find the strength to seek help and find safety.

We pray for mothers whose children are facing a serious illness, and for mothers whose illness is also a burden, that all would find strength and comfort in the arms of the Lord.

Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.

More wisdom from our mothers:

Don't put your finger in electrical sockets
Don't run with scissors
Don't talk with your mouth full
Don't forget to take the dog out
Be true to yourself
Give unconditional love and acceptance
Be strong, step out in faith
Show grace under pressure
Fresh cookies spell love
Risk vulnerability
Turn the other cheek
God helps those who help themselves

The Lord is my shepherd
Let God the Holy Spirit direct and rule your heart
Babies go to sleep when you sing hymns to them
True love is unconditional

We pray for the souls of the dead, especially today for our departed mothers and grandmothers, and their grandmothers, that their spirits and legacies may nurture us as we seek our path in life.

Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.

Happy Mother's Day. Abide in God's love. Amen+
The Rev. Dr. Linda Privitera