



Mother's Day Spirit
By Bill Lawson

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Maternal Admiration, painted by William-Adolphe Bouguereau

The motherly attributes of God as well as the godly attributes of motherly women, are highlighted by the Mother's Day spirit. Pope John Paul I, acknowledging the traditional patriarchal references to God as Father, added, "Even more, God is our Mother."¹ Motherhood is even more spiritual than it is biological. We do greatly honor and are so very grateful for our biological mothers. We also honor all the women who manifest the motherly spirit whether or not they are biological mothers. Both motherly and fatherly persons reflect the Deity. Juliana of Norwich wrote, "Just as God is our Father, so God is also our Mother."²

The Hebrew word used to name the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament is the feminine word, "*Ruwach*," according to the Old Testament Lexicon.³ Thinking of our Heavenly Parent as both Mother and Father gives us a much more complete sense of relationship with our earthly biological and spiritual parents.

Today is Mother's Day in our country and the Festival of the Christian Home in our church. As we honor mothers and motherhood in all their different forms today, we also honor families and homes in all their different forms. Families, homes, and parents are not confined to the narrow and rigid parameters imposed by secular and religious politicians. A Christian home and family may have one or more of any combination of people. Some homes, Christian and otherwise, may even be unhoused or unsheltered for any number of reasons. Families may have parents of any combination of either or both genders. The members of families may have any combination of biological or marital relationships. Remember the unique circumstances of the Holy Family whom we celebrate at Christmas. Some friends are as much a part of a family as their blood kin. Families even come in the shape of congregations – spiritual families, like ours here at Briensburg United Methodist Church. As the saying goes, "Home is where the heart is." Henry Ware captured the spirit of the Christian home in his hymn,⁴

Happy the home when God is there,
And love fills every breast;
When one their wish, and one their prayer,
And one their heav'nly rest.

The Holy Spirit is God.

At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. (*John 14:20 KJV*)

Jesus used the phrase, "at that day" in reference to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost when his followers would begin to understand that the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost are one and the same Spiritual Being. The Nicene Creed in our United Methodist Hymnal affirms that Jesus is "of one Being with the Father" and that the Holy Spirit is "the Lord, the giver of life."⁵ This is the basis for the doctrine of the Trinity.⁶ The Church Universal has wondered, argued, and split many ways throughout its history over the various ways people have of expressing this concept of the Trinity. Nonetheless, Jesus introduced the presence of the Holy Spirit as his own presence, absent his physical body, and he established his own presence with or without his physical

body as the presence of the Creator. He told Philip earlier in this chapter in the Good News Translation, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."⁷

There is an apparent expectation that the disciples would continue to live out their relationship with Jesus in somewhat similar ways as they had been while he was physically with them. This is an expectation that carries over to us, that we would live in a personal saving relationship with Christ even though he is not physically present with us. The Spirit within and among us would be Christ himself helping us to continue to move forward in this spiritual relationship while we are yet in our own bodies, and then the relationship would continue even after our physical deaths. The promise of Jesus that, "Because I live, ye shall live also"⁸ is not just for *us* but for our friends and families and others, even those who have passed through their physical deaths and continue to live as Christ lives. Jesus told Martha at the tomb of Lazarus in the New Revised Standard Version, "Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"⁹

Believing this, believing in the continuation of life in the spirit with or without our earthly tabernacles, opens endless possibilities for continuing relationships. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" Paul asked in his letter to the Corinthians.¹⁰ Jesus identified several ways relationships change after physical death. Paul's writings encourage us to cultivate the enduring spiritual aspects of our relationships, which tend to be the things we love most about our friendships. All these become a part of the blessing and confidence we have that one way or another, we will forever remain in the eternal Communion of the Saints.¹¹ During the committal at funeral services, we affirm as worded in the older Methodist Book of Worship, "The spirit of the [dearly] departed hath returned to God who gave it."¹² This is the God of whom Paul spoke in today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles, as "not far from every one of us," in whom "we live and move and have our being."¹³ This is the God of whom the psalmist wrote, "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?"¹⁴

No wonder we so often feel we are being visited by the spirits of family and friends who have gone on to glory before us! Butterflies come and remind me that my mother is near, loving me in spirit. Hymns remind us that friends and loved ones are here during our worship times, present with us in spirit. During the Sacrament of Holy Communion, we celebrate from the Book of Worship our spiritual connection with all God's "people on earth and all the company of heaven."¹⁵ In dreams, in music, in conversations, at meals, in prayers, at special occasions, and at countless other times and ways and places we are blessed to experience the closeness of those who have loved us.

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, [the Bible says in Hebrews 12], let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.¹⁶

Paul introduced Christ with love and respect.

For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, To The Unknown God. Whom therefore ye [unknowingly] worship, [this God] declare I unto you. (*Acts 17:23 KJV*)

Paul attended a gathering at Mars Hill on the Acropolis in Athens of people who held a variety of religious and philosophical views. The modern-day "Parliament of the World's Religions" perhaps resembles that kind of gathering, with its mission "to cultivate harmony among the world's religious

and spiritual communities.”¹⁷ Paul joined the others in advocating for his beliefs as they did for theirs. Paul did not dismiss or condemn or disrespect other religions or philosophies. Instead, he acknowledged the monuments they had built to other gods and treated their proponents with respect. With his characteristic love and emphasis on unity, Paul discovered a meaningful intersection with their ideologies for sharing what he brought to the proverbial table. There, at the Altar to the Unknown God, Paul introduced Jesus.

Paul’s sermon resulted in mixed responses, as sermons tend to do. Apparently, most of those people rejected the whole idea of the Resurrection (at least for the time being). But others expressed a desire to learn more and several are reported in the Bible to have believed on that very day, and they entered into their own saving relationship with God in Christ. Two of them are specifically named in the Bible. One was a man named Dionysius¹⁸, who went on to become the first Bishop of Athens. The other was a woman named Damaris.¹⁹ Even though whatever Damaris did was important enough to God to ensure her name was written in the Bible, and even though the Greek Orthodox Church canonized her as a saint, her contribution to the establishment of one of the greatest spheres of Christendom has gone largely unrecorded like the stories of countless other women throughout history. From this humble, loving moment when Paul shared his faith on Mars Hill, innumerable people have come to know Christ for themselves over the millennia and to lead others into the fellowship of believers.

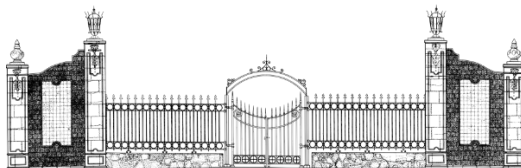
Conclusion

The essence of the Mother’s Day spirit is God’s love as demonstrated in the relationships, careers, testimonies, endeavors, and families of women. Even though God is neither male nor female, God is most often characterized with masculine nouns and pronouns, but God is characterized in the Hebrew language of the Bible with both feminine and masculine nouns and pronouns. The Holy Spirit Jesus promised to send to be our “Helper”²⁰ as translated in the Good News Translation is the same Spirit who “moved upon the face of the waters” in the second verse of the Bible, where she is identified in the Hebrew text with the feminine noun.²¹

An authentic celebration of the spirit of mothers and of the Christian home would include a recognition and appreciation of the great contributions women have historically made to the church and society, along with the elimination of barriers and discrimination that make it difficult for them to accomplish all that God empowers them to do. Likewise, an authentic celebration of the Festival of the Christian Home would include recognition and appreciation of families in all their forms as the basic units of society, where love and respect are cultivated and nurtured.

As we celebrate Mother’s Day today, let us be mindful of the ways women manifest the feminine nature of God, and the contributions women make in every area of life. Let us be prayerful for women who are suffering, and supportive of those who are struggling. Let us also be prayerful for families, that they may dwell together in peace and safety, with fair access to food, shelter, and medical care.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.



Mother's Day Spirit

Manuscript of the sermon preached by Rev. Bill Lawson on May 14, 2023, at Briensburg UMC
Bible Readings for the 6th Sunday of Easter, Revised Common Lectionary
Acts 17:22-31; Psalm 66:8-20; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21

Acknowledgments

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Bible Quotations

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Notes

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- ³ Francis Brown, 1849-1916. "Ruwach." *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon : with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic : Coded with the Numbering System from Strong's*. Bible Study Tools. [Web](#). 11 May 2023.
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- ⁷ John 14:9 (GNT).
- ⁸ John 14:19 (KJV).
- ⁹ John 11:26 (NRSV).
- ¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 1:55 (KJV).

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- ¹¹ Wikipedia Contributors. "Communion of the Saints." Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. [Web](#). 11 May 2023.
- ¹² The United Methodist Church. "The Order for the Burial of the Dead." *The Book of Worship for Church and Home*, p. 41. Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1965. Rpt. *The Book of Worship for Church and Home*. Board of Publication of The Methodist Church, Inc., 1965. Print. Also, Internet Archive. [Web](#). 11 May 2023.
- ¹³ Acts 17:27-28 (KJV).
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