

May 9th, 2021 • Mother's Day • Baptism • Online Worship

"Living the Way of Love: A Revival of Love"

Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris



John 15:9-17

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

God's love is so great and all-encompassing, we need the whole season of Eastertide to take it in. Each Sunday in this joyful season, Scripture seems to be almost repeating itself as it tells us over and over again about God's love as revealed to us in our Risen Lord, as if hearing it just once couldn't possibly be enough to take it in.

What a word to hear again now, on this Mother's Day. The parallels between God's love and a mother's love are plain to see. In the words of the Catholic spiritual writer *Thérèse of Lisieux*: "the loveliest masterpiece of the heart of God is the heart of a mother"—and as we well know, that could be a birth mother, an adoptive mother, a stepmother, a special aunt, a grandmother, a teacher, a mentor, a neighbor. And to many kids, God has given a loving, mothering congregation, as is this one, for so many children and youth.

The point is, we learn God's amazing love for us through those adults who live it and make it real in our lives. On Mother's Day we lift up mothers of all kinds, all you who live out God's love and do God's work in bearing and nurturing and raising up each new generation of God's people on this earth. Today we honor you and show our love for you and take time to simply pause and reflect and say "thank you."

We rejoice this morning as a church family in the baptism of Catherine Leona Sondecker, our first baptism in over a year. This little one is already showered with the love of her parents and grandparents. She is being cradled in the prayers of her wider church family, people she may never meet or know, whose love for her is already including her as the newest member of a great community of love. This community of love incarnates God's love for her even long before she can possibly know what it means, showing her how to receive love and how to love others. It's how we learn how God loves us. As Julian of Norwich put it in the 14th century: "In love God clothes us, enfolds and embraces us; that tender love completely surrounds us, never to leave us."

It's not easy being a mother, I don't have to tell you. And so, as we pray for mothers today, we also pray for fathers, for grandparents, for all the loving family and friends, the Sunday School teachers, who will help nurture the babies and children along the way and who lend their faithful support to mothers striving to do their best. And in blessing mothers, even our own, where it is needed, we pray forgiveness and healing, we pray for acceptance of less than perfect mothering, for we know that God's love, pardon and assurance is available to all and that new beginnings are always possible and that most kids learn how to love and thrive anyway through the grace of God.

Bishop Michael Curry, whose book *Love Is the Way: Holding on to Hope in Troubling Times*, is the source of this year's Eastertide theme, calls for a necessary "revival of love" as the foundation and guide for all relationships, for our individual and collective spiritual, material, and physical well-being. In asserting this, Bishop Curry quotes

and builds on the words of Martin Luther King, Jr.: “We must discover the power of love, the power, the redemptive power of love. And when we discover that, we will be able to make of this old world a new world. Love is the only way.”

Bishop Curry makes clear that this “love” we’re talking about here is not simply a sentiment or feeling. It’s an active doing and way of being in the world. It’s a commitment to open our eyes and hearts and wallets to reach out in love to those who need it most, to act for the well-being of someone other than ourselves. This love turns the world upside down, exalting those of low degree, as the Bible tells us in the song that Jesus’ own mother, Mary sang, as she celebrated his coming birth and all that it would mean for all the mothers and children of the world. This love, Bishop Curry maintains, “is a pledge to see the good and to work for the good and welfare of others, not stopping at our front door or our neighborhood, our religion or race, or our state’s or our country’s border. It is one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth.”

This love is what motivates this congregation to participate in Home Run for Kids to support the families, the mothers and children served by Upward Bound House. This love is what draws us to send donations and Mother’s Day cards to Harvest Home, working to transform the lives of homeless pregnant women and their children by providing housing, support, and programs that equip women to become great mothers. This love is what keeps us in relationship with the Children, Youth & Family Collaborative, the ministry to foster-care youth led by our covenant missionary, Lydia Templeton, in their walk-a-thon on May 22. You’ll find details about how you can add your support in the insert in today’s Order of Worship and on our website. And this great love of God, love in action, takes us all the way to Haiti, where our donations help address the food insecurity taking a toll on so many families, through our donations and our Pennies for Peanuts in Haiti mission outreach.

The love of God that we first learn as tiny babies, the love that is nurtured in our homes and families, is a love that teaches us to love all the babies and children whose names we may never know even as we love each precious newborn born into our immediate orbit of love. May the blessings of Mother’s Day fall upon them all.

John Wesley’s hymn-writing brother, Charles, put it this way, in a beautiful hymn:

Happy soul, whose active love emulates the Blessed above,
in thy every action seen, sparkling from the soul within:
Thou to every sufferer nigh, hearest, not in vain, the cry
of widow in distress, of the poor, the shelter-less:
Love, which willest all should live, Love, which all to all would give,
Love, that over all prevails, Love, that never, never fails.
Love immense, and unconfined, Love to all of humankind.

This is a beautiful Mother’s Day. We pray love to over all prevail, love that never, never fails, love immense, and unconfined, love to all of humankind.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

Notes:

Bishop Michael Curry. *Love Is the Way: Holding on to Hope in Troubling Times*. New York: Avery, 2020.

Julian of Norwich quoted in Ward and Wild, *Resources for Preaching and Worship, Year B*, p 138

Charles Wesley, From *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749), No. 8, "The Beatitudes"

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