“Seasons”

Mother’s Day

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; Exodus 20:12 Kimby Young

2 Timothy 1:3-7; Romans 12:15 May 14, 2017

I have wrestled a bit with what to preach on this Mother’s Day. It is a day with very mixed moods. For some, even most – it’s a day of happiness and joy. For others it’s a day tinged with sorrow or regret. It’s complicated and full of emotion. At the risk of bringing on a few tears, I want to take on that mix of moods and bring our faith to it. For motherhood - indeed parenthood – taps the core of our souls, core of our identity, and stirs us profoundly.

When I was growing up in a very loving home – Mother’s Day was very simple. And fortunately for many of us it still is. It is easy for me to “honor my father and mother.” I’ll stack my mother, and for that matter my father, against the best of parents. So for me Mother’s Day and Father’s day are full of joy. But for some, the days are painful and difficult.

My first realization of this was in my childhood. Growing up in the sixties in the south – there were certain Mother’s day rituals. Early I learned that everyone went to church wearing a rose on mother’s day. A red rose was to honor your living mother. A white rose meant that your mother had passed away and you honored her memory. I remember vividly the first year my father wore a white rose after his mother, my grandmother, had passed away. That was the first year I noticed how very many white roses there were at church that Sunday.

My second realization was in seminary. I went shopping to buy a Mother’s Day card with a friend. I found many cards to capture a little bit of the love I felt. But my friend had a very bad relationship with her mother, so the day for her was about trying to honor her mother while feeling pain and guilt and manipulation, trying to please someone who couldn’t be pleased. I realized for the first time that year, that for some, for many, both for mothers and for children who are estranged, Mother’s day is a painful reminder of brokenness, a cry for healing.

My third realization of the complexity of Mother’s Day was in my first church out of seminary. During the year a woman in the church had a son die. In that same year, another woman in the church had a child diagnosed with a terminal illness. That was also the year when my own sister had a miscarriage and lost a much wanted, much loved baby. That year as I struggled and as I watched my friends struggle through a mother’s day worship service, I became aware of a very vivid pain which some experience while others of us rejoice. Over the years, I have heard and felt countless stories of struggle, infertility, barrenness, miscarriage, death, and loss. Of women who wanted to be mothers but who could not be. Of mothers who have lost the love of their life, a part of themselves. Over the years I have heard many stories. I know you have as well. I know for many of you, even here and now, this day carries memories of pain or loss – the darkest days of your lives, the deepest losses, the agony of heart. And for you I pray peace, now and in the days ahead.

All of this is not to say that Mother’s day is a bad thing. Quite the contrary. Mother’s day is a beautiful thing. And those who suffer most will say it loudest. There is nothing more wonderful than honoring someone you love. There is nothing more blessed than the relationship of a loving mother and child.

I have experienced that firsthand – and I would do anything to express my gratitude to my mother again, and to God for the gift of her presence in my life.

Mother’s day is a pleasure, a blessing - when children offer simple gifts – hugs and smiles and treasures, when we take a moment to honor those who are special to us, when we remember birth and life and joy and family, and all the gifts our God has to offer us. The joy and the sorrow stand side by side in life – the rainbow and the rain.

For the church there is a challenge that goes hand in hand with the blessings of Mother’s Day. The challenge is to be aware.

Be aware that we are not all the same. Families come in all shapes and sizes and characters, as do memories, as do relationships. Be aware of those who may feel differently than you. And that’s a good thing to do every day – not just on Mother’s Day.

Be aware that alongside joy, often times there comes sorrow.

Be aware that some are in pain, AND that we have been gifted with a response to that pain - the good news of God’s healing grace. We as a community are able to surround each person with that grace and love. To offer God’s love to everyone – for we all need it in some way or another.

If you are as fortunate today as I am – to know a loving family and a blessed home - then thank God. Enjoy it as a gift of God. And spend some time today with someone you love.

But if you are not so fortunate today – if you face some pain, some grief, some challenge, then know that God is with you, know that there are people in this community of faith who care for you, and know that your pain is not the end of the story. If you need someone, pray now, talk to God now, and after the service call me or call someone else in the church for help. God will provide healing and wholeness in its time. As the scripture says, for everything there is a season. If that season of healing doesn’t seem to come soon enough, know and remember you are not alone.

Hear again and remember, today especially, our God who is with you - our Mother God – AMMA - that is a legitimate Biblical name for God we don’t always use. A Biblical image of God as mother of us all. Remember Mother God is with you. God - who has birthed you and blessed you, who walks with you each step, who surrounds you with comforting arms, who wraps you in love, who holds you close and will not let you go. Know this God of love, as this God knows you. Know this God of compassion and caring, this God of warmth and solace, this God of comfort and of power, this God who nurtures and who nests, this God of great mercy and endless love. This God loves you and is with you now.

Praise be to our Mother, our Maker, our Solace and our Strength, in the name of Jesus Christ her beloved child, and our salvation. Amen.