

Shiloh United Methodist Church

Women, Our Neighbors and Mothers

Acts 9:36-43

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May 12, 2019

One of my favorite poets says, "If I should have a daughter, instead of "Mom," she's going to call me "Point B," because that way she knows that no matter what happens, at least she can always find her way to me."¹

For some in our world, mom has been their point B. A place to go to when times are hard, one who is will to say yes to serving so others can know they are loved. In fact when we imagine mothering love in our culture, I think we imagine a love that correlates very closely to the unconditional love that we believe God shares with us, the same love exemplified through Christ's life, and resurrection.

Now on any mother's day I always need to say this, and this is why I shared the prayer I did in my Pastor's Corner², "Not everyone has a positive mother figure in their life, so know that I as a Pastor understand this, that God understands this, and that God hopes that each of us can have a mothering figure in our lives, even when that is not our biological mother." However, Jesus used parent imagery to describe God, because that kind of image exemplifies how close and personal we should consider the cosmic love of our God, that is born in us through Christ.

As a pastor, you should know I never quite feel complete when we say the Lord's prayer each week, because it just says, "Our

¹ https://www.ted.com/talks/sarah_kay_if_i_should_have_a_daughter/transcript?language=en

² <https://mailchi.mp/91881e92c673/pastors-corner-2908629>

Father.” It leaves out any sense of the mothering love of God. Father love is very important, but mothering love is too. In fact we know that kids need a balance of different kinds of love to grow up well and balanced. The prayer we say each Sunday is related to the Greek word for father we find in the gospel texts of Matthew and Luke, however Mark has no version of the Lord’s prayer. Gospel scholars are convinced because Matthew and Luke are so similar that they had another source text, that if you do some research you will find biblical scholars refer to as Q. We don’t know if Jesus meant to just say father, because we don’t have Q, but in my own study of Jesus I have come doubt he meant God’s love just to be masculine, that in truth he hoped the feminine side to be present too.

On this Mother’s day as we explore how to follow the Christian path of loving our neighbors more, I invite us to consider how we cannot afford to support mothering love if we are to heal the nations, our world, and our neighborhoods.

Mr. Rogers has a great episode that he starts by talking about his mother and how he remembers how much she loves him. I want to share that clip with us now. <https://vimeo.com/88089113>

Many of you know my mom died this spring, and for me my mom was point B, just like the poet I shared earlier describes being a mother. We always knew in my family that no matter what happened we could find our way to her for love, care and a word of encouraging peace.

Forever, in my mind will be dwelling an image of the final night holding my mother’s hand. I didn’t realize how deeply that image was emblazoned on my mind until the week after I was at her bedside as she drew the final breaths of this life. A week later I was in Portland, Oregon gathering to pray with my friends from across the church in the

Western United States about where our church might step in an uncertain future, a church that had mothered me and many of us in our faith and had died a death a month before. That week of saying yes to an uncertain future, I recognized my mother's hand as an image in my mind, as I was standing with a group of my friends and laying hands on another to pray for them. Seeing the different marks on hands of friends born all over the world, I realized I could easily identify my mom's hand if it were among them. And that in the hands of others I saw similarities of my mother's hands. In that moment I realized that gathered in a prayer of Christ love over another, I saw a reflection of the care of my mother's love that she shared for those in her life

I need to be honest, I was my mother's favorite.

However, God's mothering love treats us all that way. We are all God's favorite, it doesn't make sense, but it is true. In that moment of seeing my mother's hands and care reflected in my group of friends I realized her hand's had card for others by baking, preparing food, cleaning, working, lifting others up. Her hands held mine in tough times, held other hands in tough times, and supported so many in the life she live. I will ever be thankful to have held my mother's hand in the last moments of this life, and I trust that God carries her spirit on into eternity.

I want us to stop for one moment as a group, and think about the work and story of our own Mother's hands. Maybe not our biological mom, maybe it is a mother figure in your life that showed you true mothering love. Take a deep breath and imagine...the times spent caring for you, the times spent holding your hand, the times spent hugging you with that hand, the time picking you up from a fall. Think about how a mom has cared for you. Know that this a reflection of mothering love that God I believe offers to us always, mothering love is Point B love it is love that lifts us up.

Our scripture today is found in the book of Acts, a book we will study much of this month as we look at neighboring. This book I believe

contains key stories of what it means to follow Christ in our world today. Today's story finds us in Joppa, a place where Peter would also learn he was called to not just minister to the Jewish Christians, but to non-Jewish Christians too. It is the same port Jonah passed through as he wavered to say yes to God, but eventually followed God to welcome in people he thought were outside God's love. Joppa is a place to say, "Yes" to God.

Acts 9:36-43 Common English Bible (CEB)

³⁶ In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas). Her life overflowed with good works and compassionate acts on behalf of those in need. ³⁷ About that time, though, she became so ill that she died. After they washed her body, they laid her in an upstairs room. ³⁸ Since Lydda was near Joppa, when the disciples heard that Peter was there, they sent two people to Peter. They urged, "Please come right away!" ³⁹ Peter went with them. Upon his arrival, he was taken to the upstairs room. All the widows stood beside him, crying as they showed the tunics and other clothing Dorcas made when she was alive.

⁴⁰ Peter sent everyone out of the room, then knelt and prayed. He turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up!" She opened her eyes, saw Peter, and sat up. ⁴¹ He gave her his hand and raised her up. Then he called God's holy people, including the widows, and presented her alive to them. ⁴² The news spread throughout Joppa, and many put their faith in the Lord. ⁴³ Peter stayed for some time in Joppa with a certain tanner named Simon.

After a death I am always lost in these resurrection texts. Lost wishing we could do resurrection anytime. Right now after my mom's death I got lost in our scripture text this week, wishing it was possible to have had Peter there in the hospital to do this work. Lost in this resurrection text you will find something unique about our call as neighbors to women. First, resurrection, while we all wish it was bodily all the time

in the way we see here, happens every day through God. Second, faith leaves us to trust that while this account sounds one way and we think we understand this miracle, I don't think we do, but we can in part if we look at the passage more closely.

First, resurrection happens every day. This in truth in the reality that my mother's spirit, her very life force, lived in me before her death and continues in me. And even for those whose mother's aren't biologically connected our mothers live in us through the way we continue to love the world. I can vouch this is true because in some of the moment's of life I can hear the nagging part as well of the loving part of my mother's voice in my brain. If the nagging can hold on and sustain us, so too must the loving voice too.

Second, faith leaves us to trust that resurrection is possible, and even moments beyond what we can comprehend. That means we have to believe that we can work alongside Christ to transform our world and that perhaps through prayer and serving others we can bring about resurrection. Methodists, followers of Christ using the practices of John Wesley have done this for years. When Montana lacked hospitals, safe places for children, and institutes of education we formed those. Methodists helped form Billings clinic and I have seen miracles come out of the medical work there. Intermountain Children's home in Helena was formed by Methodist women who are helping us understand the relational model of transforming lives of children who are struggling. Rocky Mountain College continues to educate and transform lives right here in Billings, and they were started by Methodists.

Friends last month Methodists in Billings raised over 15,000 diapers for mom's in need.³

³ https://billingsgazette.com/news/local/local-methodist-congregations-gather-more-than-diapers-for-community-diaper/article_76eabfd2-54cd-560d-a055-7ef7458b9799.html

Last week, we heard from Matt Lundgren the director of Montana Rescue Mission and Friendship House of Christian service he shared these stats with us about women struggling in our community: 8% of families in Montana live in poverty, but 80% of families on the southside of Billings live in poverty. In Montana, 35% of single moms are in poverty, but on the south side 98% of single moms are in poverty.

Additionally, last week we heard of another terrible school shooting in Colorado, to which my fellow clergy, many who are mothers, offered care as they feared send their kids to school the next day. Last, night there was a death by shooting in the heights.

I believe we can be a part of lifting up mother's, children and if you look in the text you can see it can be done. Through prayer, through speaking to those who need new life, and then by taking their hand. We are called to do this work together.

I want to stop for a moment and have us listen to some additional wisdom from Fred Roger's:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-LGHtc_D328

The helpers, when the world seems to be dying Fred Roger's mother says look for the helpers. Peter in our story today is the helper.

It seems that when we are most desperate as people of God, it is the mother's that say yes to God first, for they are the perpetual and unconditional helpers in our lives. A mother's love is one that says yes when others would turn it down. Mary's song when she learns that she will bear Jesus is one of a profound and deep yes.

The Franciscan Monk and author Richard Rohr says,

“Mary is the Great Yes that humanity forever needs for Christ to be born into the world. Even Paul McCartney immortalized this idea in his song “Let It Be,” although on the first level he was talking about his own mother, Mary: Mother Mary comes to me, Speaking words of wisdom, “Let it be.” That’s why people in the first thousand years loved her so much. In Mary, we see that God must never be forced on us, and God never comes uninvited.”⁴

That's why this last week amidst all of the struggling news this story caught my eye. (Show picture). These two woman were running a marathon in Pittsburgh. Both were about to quit, give up, and then they found each other. What did they do, like Peter they took one another by the hand and committed to finishing the race. They finished last, but last is where they belonged. At one point they let go of each other’s hands and minute later one said to the other, “I am not finishing this without you.”⁵

God’s love is like that of a mother, it says yes, it says I am not finishing this without you. Why does God want us to know this? Because God wants to be our point B, so that no matter where we go we know that if we come back to God we will find life and find it abundantly.

So friends, how will you say, “yes” this week, this month, this lifetime to being God’s helper? Will we change one life, or transform many lives, or both? I think my mother taught me one thing, it is that our hands will transform the world and it will be through small acts of love that grow into bigger ones.

⁴ Rohr, Richard. The Universal Christ (p. 127). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

⁵ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/women-viral-pittsburgh-marathon-photo-encouraged-each-other-finish-race-n1003841>

Go in the peace of Christ this day, Amen.