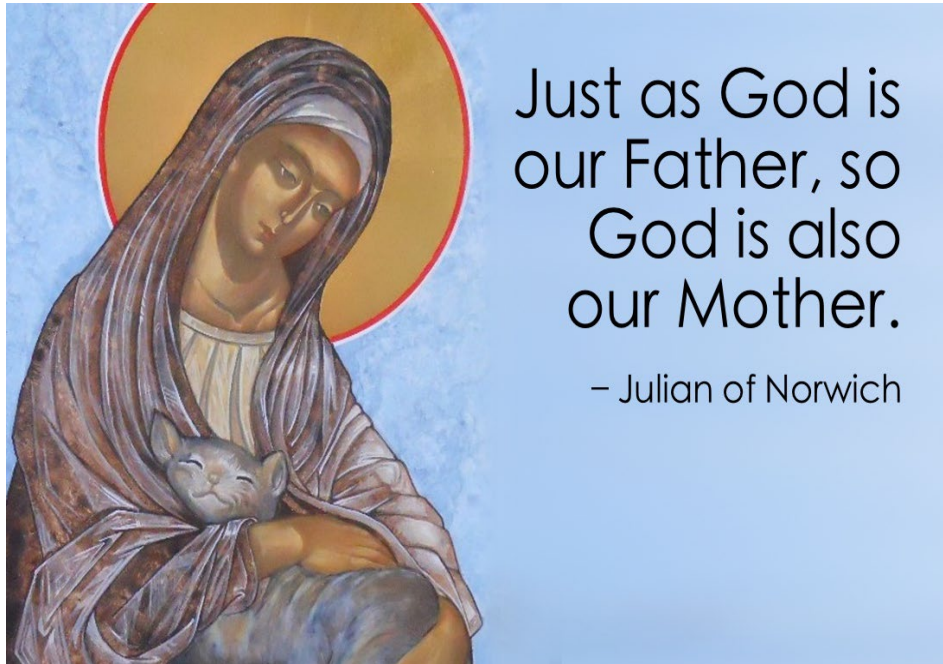


Glen Ridge Congregational Church  
Sunday, May 11, 2025

## The Motherhood of God



**Will you pray with me? Ever-present God, be in our hearing and in our speaking so that whatever we do, we grow closer to your heart and to one another. In the name of the Risen Christ, Amen.**

Because today is Mother's Day, we thought it an appropriate opportunity to think about and talk about feminine metaphors for God – specifically, God as Our Mother.

This is not an altogether new concept for most of us – but I still think it might be helpful to set the context a bit at the outset.

One thing we all know is that God is greater than any image or metaphor that we use to refer to God. And, God is greater than any pronoun that we regularly substitute for God's name to make our sentences seem less awkward.

All images and names that we call on – Father, Ruler, King of Kings, the Solid Rock, the Great Physician, the Just Judge, the Good Shepherd, the Nurturing Mother – are metaphors, useful in helping us understand particular aspects of God and bringing us into a closer relationship with the One who is Creator and Sustainer of Life. None of

these names comprehensively or conclusively capture the full nature and essence of the One who is Eternal, Omnipotent, Omnipresent, and beyond our comprehension.

But because we are finite, limited, time- and experience-bound, we find that our spirits are touched, nurtured and strengthened by the use of concrete images and vivid metaphors that speak to our hearts and souls and bring us closer to the One we call God.

All of us are conversant with masculine images of God:

- in the common and familiar references to the three members of the Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- in Michelangelo's painting of a male God and Adam on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel
- in the frequent use of male pronouns in the Bible, in our hymns, and in our liturgy.

In fact, the use of male references to God are so familiar to us that we may sometimes forget that God is neither male nor female and that the masculine language we use is, in fact, metaphorical – not literal.

The God we worship is much greater than the gendered language we assign to God – which means that we can be free to explore other metaphors or images of God and by so doing perhaps expand our experience of God in our lives and deepen our personal relationships to the Creator and Sustainer of our lives.

We have done this for a few years at GRCC in the introduction we offer to the Lord's prayer when we state that Jesus taught his disciples this prayer so that we would have the words to pray to the one who is "the Mother of us all".

This morning, we want to go a little further with this concept of God as "Mother of us all" and see if we can explore more specific ways that this metaphor might stir our hearts and our spirits.

Today, I have chosen a few observations, statements, and stories about Mothers from a range of sources for us to think about. I hope that when we hear these, we will listen at two levels. First, we may recognize the truth in what is being said about our earthly Mothers. At a second level, however, I hope we can see these statements and stories as messages about God and the relationship that God our Mother seeks to have with each of us.

*I have loosely organized these statements and stories around three themes:*

*God our Mother, is the Creator and Sustainer of Life  
God, our Mother, calls us by name and we are never the same  
God, our Mother, overcomes all barriers to be with us, to forgive us, to love us.*

1. The first theme is: *God our Mother is the Creator and Sustainer of Life.*

Here are a few statements from a variety of wise sources about the influence of Mothers in the minds and hearts of children and the work of Mothers to ensure a safe place for children in the world:

A Jewish Proverb states: “A mother understands what a child does not say.”

William Makepeace Thackeray said: “Mother is the name for God in the lips and hearts of children.”

Barbara Kingsolver has written: “Sometimes the strength of motherhood is greater than natural laws.”

Luree Miller said: “While others strive to compete, mothers work to hold the world together.”

And from the words of young children who were asked how God made Mothers:

“...out of clouds and angel hair and everything nice in the world with one dab of mean.”

And

“God used dirt, just like the rest of us.”

Fitting all of these wise words together – especially the dirt piece – made me think of a poem that many of us know. From James Weldon Johnson’s book, *God’s Trombones*, the poem, *The Creation* is a wonderful re-telling of the Genesis story that we all know so well. Near the end of the poem, Johnson describes the Creator as a “mammy bending over her baby.” Here are Johnson’s words substituting feminine pronouns to extend his metaphor:

...Then God thought, I’ll make me a person  
Up from the bed of the river, She scooped the clay

And near the bank of that river, She kneeled Herself down  
And there – the Great God Almighty, who lit the sun and placed it in the sky,  
Who flung the stars to the most far corner of the night,  
Who rounded the Earth in the middle of Her hand,  
This Great God, like a mammy bending over her baby,  
Knelt down in the dust.  
Toiling over a lump of clay.  
Till She shaped it in Her own image.  
And into it She blew the breath of life.  
And the Human became a living soul. Amen. Amen

*God our Mother is the Creator and Sustainer of Life.*

2. The second theme for us to consider is: *God, our Mother, calls us by Name – and we are never the same.*

Hear these words from people testifying about the impact of Mothers who called them by name and they were never the same:

Abraham Lincoln: “All that I am or hope to be I owe to my angel mother.”

Charles Chaplin: “It seems to me that my mother was the most splendid woman I ever knew....If I have amounted to anything, it will be due to her.”

George Washington: “All I am I owe to my mother. I attribute all my success in life to the moral, intellectual, and physical education I received from her.”

Strickland Gillilan: “Richer than I you can never be – I had a mother who read to me.”

To expand on the power of being called by our true names, I have a story from Father Gregory Boyle, a Jesuit Priest who has worked for years in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles, a neighborhood with the highest concentration of gang activity in the City of Los Angeles. Father Greg shares wise and poignant stories of his work with gang members and families in his marvelous book, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion*.

One story from this book is about his first meeting with a young man after Mass at a camp for delinquent minors. As the young man approaches to speak with him, it is

clear that he is “all swagger and pose. His head bobs, side-to side to make sure all eyes are on him...” and he has a scowl etched on his face.

Father Greg asks his name. “Sniper,” the kid answers. As Father Greg explains, he has seen kids like this before – so he begins to question him more closely. Continuing rounds of questions result in less-guarded and more sincere answers.

After “sniper,” the kid gives his last name – Gonzalez; then, after more questions, he gives a generic street name – Cabron.

Father Greg’s story continues:

“Son, I’m looking for birth certificate here.” The kid softens. I can tell it’s happening. But there is embarrassment and a newfound vulnerability. “Napoleón,” he manages to squeak out, pronouncing it in Spanish.

“Wow,” I say, “That’s a fine, noble, historic name. But I’m almost positive that when your jefita calls you, she doesn’t use the whole nine yards. Come on, mijito, do you have an apodo? What’s your mom call you?”

Then I watch him go to some far, distant place — a location he has not visited in some time. His voice, body language, and whole being are taking on a new shape — right before my eyes.

“Sometimes,”— his voice so quiet, I lean in — “sometimes . . . when my mom’s not mad at me . . . she calls me . . . Napito.”

I watched this kid move transformed, from Sniper to Gonzalez to Cabrón to Napoleón to Napito. We all just want to be called by the name our mom uses when she’s not mad at us.

God, our Mother, calls us all by name and we are transformed, making us better than we could have hoped or dreamed.

*God our Mother calls us by name, and we are never, ever the same.*

3. The third theme is: *God, our Mother, overcomes all obstacles to be with us, to forgive us, to love us.*

Pearl S. Buck. “Some are kissing mothers and some are scolding mothers, but it is love just the same, and most mothers kiss and scold together.”

Anonymous: “Mothers are the only goddesses in whom the whole world believes.”

Honore de Balzac: “The heart of a mother is a deep abyss at the bottom of which you will always discover forgiveness.”

I want to share one more story from Father Gregory.

‘At Camp Paige, a county detention facility near Glendora, I was getting to know fifteen-year-old Rigo, who was about to make his first communion. The Catholic volunteers had found him a white shirt and black tie. We still had some fifteen minutes before the other incarcerated youth would join us for Mass in the gym, and I’m asking Rigo the basic stuff about his family and his life. I ask about his father.

“‘Oh,’ he says, ‘he’s a heroin addict and never really been in my life. Used to always beat me. Fact, he’s in prison right now. Barely ever lived with us.’ Then something kind of snaps in him—an image brings him to attention.”

Father Boyle listens as Rigo tells a heart-breaking story of physical abuse, as the 15-year-old begins to cry. “...he’s wailing and rocking back and forth. I put my arm around him. He is inconsolable.... When Rigo composes himself, I ask, ‘And your mom?’ He points some distance from where we are to a tiny woman standing by the gym’s entrance. ‘That’s her over there.’ He pauses for a beat, ‘There’s no one like her.’

“Again, some slide appears in his mind, and a thought occurs. ‘I’ve been locked up for more than a year and a half. She comes to see me every Sunday. You know how many buses she takes every Sunday—to see my sorry self?’

“Then quite unexpectedly he sobs with the same ferocity as before. Again, it takes him some time to reclaim breath and an ability to speak. Then he does, gasping through his tears. ‘Seven buses. She takes . . . seven . . . buses. Imagine.’

“How, then, to imagine,” Father Gregory asks “the expansive heart of this God — greater than God — who takes seven buses, just to arrive at us.”

God, our Mother, overcomes all obstacles – every Sunday, seven buses, just to arrive at us. God, our Mother’s heart is a deep abyss and at the bottom is forgiveness.

*God, our Mother, overcomes all barriers to be with us, to forgive us, to love us.*

These three themes – I believe are actually three truths that we can trust:

*God our Mother, is the Creator and Sustainer of Life*

*God, our Mother, calls us by name and we are never the same*

*God, our Mother, overcomes all barriers to be with us, to forgive us, to love us.*

On this Mother's Day, let's joyfully celebrate our human mothers, remembering those who are no longer with us – who we hold in our hearts forever – and embracing and celebrating those who sit at table with us. It is a wonderful day.

But let us also find time to connect to the one who is the Mother of us all. Let us be amazed and grateful that we have been fashioned from the dirt by the loving Mother kneeling by the river to breathe life into our beings. Let us listen for the name that God our Mother uses to call us to Herself. And let us know with humility that God our Mother will overcome all obstacles to be with us – even seven buses.

Amen.