

## **(7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter – Mother's Day)**

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Acts 17

We know Jesus had a mother, Mary. We tell her story. But think of how many other women, who birthed sons and daughters in our faith story, who never get mentioned.

Paul had a mother. So did Peter, Silas, Timothy, Barabas, and Judas.

James and John are referred to as the sons of Zebedee (sons of Thunder), but what about the woman who gave birth to them? Was she equally "Thunderous"?

Women, starting with Eve, have played a central role in our faith story. And while not all of them have been mothers, through their own story as told in scripture, sought to nurture, care for, show compassion to, and touch another's life, bringing them closer to God.

Jesus knew the importance of women, beyond simply bearing children for a man. Women played an equal role in God's Kingdom as his disciples. They actually were the first post-resurrection disciples, experiencing the empty tomb for themselves, and then being sent by the Risen One and the Angel Messengers to share the good news with others! Mary Magdalene even has her own Gospel though it, along with a number of others, were not included by a group of men.

This morning, I asked you to think about three women who had helped to nurture and shape your life and faith. In answering that question, we often think of our mom's and grandmothers, but I imagine there are also women who were not our mom's, in fact, who played an important role in our upbringing and faith development? In fact, they might not have been a "mom" at all, and like the women in the Bible, by their presence - as a teacher, a neighbor, a business owner, a doctor, or a faith leader, showed us something of the grace and love of God.

The "We Believe" section of our Affirmation of Faith we are using today, reminds us of the sacred image of God present in all human beings which means men and WOMEN. The "Therefore We Reject" section reminds us how women who are moms, daughters, sisters, aunts, grandmothers, wives, neighbors and friends, in whom the sacred image of God dwells, are being treated today. Both statements are grounded in Scripture.

In Genesis 1, we know that God created humans, you and me, in God's own image - both male and female. The Scriptures are full of images of the feminine side of God, thus we call God "Mother" as well as "Father".

Both Matthew and Luke tell us that Jesus uses a "mothering" image when he says he wants to gather God's children around him, like a hen gathers her chicks. (Matthew 23 & Luke 13)

The writers of this Faith Statement are reminding us that how we, from the President to you and me, treat women, all women, is how we treat God.

This morning, I want to tell you about a time I witnessed the love and compassion of God through two women who were not my mom or related to me. I have never told this story to anyone besides Staci.

I was serving the church in Monroe. This was pre-Sam. It had to be the late 1990s. It was late at night, when I received a phone call from the hospital. There was a woman who was in the process of actively dying of cancer. Her teenage daughter was with her. They lived south of

Monroe, in Freeport. There was no other family present, they were alone. Could I come. I went.

There are moment's you become present to the holy, the sacred, presence of God. This was one of them. It changed me. This teenage girl, who I learned was to begin her senior year at Freeport, who was the class President, sat at her mother's bedside, holding her hand, and softly singing to her, as her mother neared her final breaths.

You ask me what the face of God looks like, I will tell you that she is a young black teenage girl and a 40 some year old dying woman.

In that room, I could only bear witness to what these two women shared.

We say in life and in death. Which also means in our giving birth, in our being raised up, and as we face our own deaths. God is with us, in us, around us. Or as Paul says this morning - in whom we live and move and have our being.

There are women, young and old, who have touched our lives, influenced our faith, and by their words, their actions, their presence have shown us the fullness of God, in whom we do live and move and have our being. Amen.

A Mother's Day Prayer posted on The God Article:

Good and gracious God, In the scriptures we are reminded of your abundance of mothering qualities. From eagles wings which lift us up to nursing mothers which will not abandon us, biblically, we are assured that you love us deeply.

Today we pause to give thanks for the deep love of mothers. We give thanks for those who've been a mother in less traditional ways as well. From older siblings in a motherless home to single fathers raising children on their own, we are thankful for the love they each share, for the way they each care, and for the way they nurture the children of the world.

At the same time, we pause to remember, those who struggle with the role of mother. And for those who want nothing more than to be a mother but so far have not found the path that is right for them.

And on this day as a nation celebrates mothers, we remember those who cannot bring themselves to celebrate because their mothers were less than motherly. They were: judgmental, belittling, violent, abusive... absent.

And we pray for those who long for an embrace from their mother just one more time.

Loving God, this day as we reflect on and give thanks for mothers and mother figures in our lives, may we recognize the reflection of you in them and then may we each live into that reflection not just with those we choose to call family but with each person we meet. Amen.