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"A Haven For Troubled Hearts"  
Psalm 139:1-6; 13-18 John 14:1-8 | Peter 2:2-10

On this day, it is tradition to honor mothers. And rightly so. Without our mothers, we wouldn't be here, in this room, right now. Motherhood is a sacred gift, filled with joy and sadness. Motherhood is rocking your colicky baby, when you *feel* you haven't slept for days, and probably haven't. Motherhood is deciding to go back to work because you love your children. It's deciding to stay *home* because you love your children. Being a mother is leaving a bad situation, even though it's hard, because you know it's for the best. Motherhood is raw, unfiltered. One of the most challenging positions in life. It's ruthless and tears our bodies apart, and yet we do it. Wholeheartedly. Because we know the joy a child brings surmounts all the pain.

Not all women are mothers. Anna Jarvis, the woman who began the tradition of Mother's Day was not a mother. Some women choose not to have children because they don't feel led. Others aren't able or have lost a child too soon. No matter the circumstance, we have all come from a mother, even if she left a lot to be desired. And in some cases where a mother was absent, physically and/or emotionally, there is usually another who steps in, whether it's through adoption, foster care, or even a friend. Not all women are mothers in the sense that they give birth, but all mothers are women. And there is a bond, a strength we women have with one another. And we all have the responsibility to take care of each other and this world, and share the beauties that only women can share. This is why I chose the hymn "God of the Women," even though it's not blatantly about motherhood. All women are a part of the "mother church." Men, too. But today's focus is on motherhood. Sorry guys.

I want to do something a little different here and ask for your participation. Don't worry, you won't have to stand up. For those who feel led, in one or two words, call out a characteristic you feel is the core a good mother.

Pause

These are all great. Thank you.

These examples, we know because it's either what we've experienced from our own mothers or it's what we long for in a mother.

There are parts of motherhood that don't come naturally. As mothers, we *learn* how to change a diaper. How to make baby food or what food to buy. We decode cries, learn safety guidelines, and much, much more. And this is just the baby phase!

But there's a divine code, unique to each mother, impressed upon her heart by our creator that once that child arrives, she knows, we know, and we use that knowledge to care for our children. Sometimes we might need someone to help us with the decoding,

but more often than not we know how to meet the deepest needs of our children, even when we doubt ourselves.

I want to reread Psalms 139:7-10 – read

The author of these verses is writing about the relationship they have with God, an ode to His all-encompassing love. He is our creator. He knows us intimately. Our secrets. Our deep pain. What makes us laugh and brings us life-fulfilling joy. The author believes God is always there, and I do, too.

And just as we can never escape God's love, so to can we never escape the love it took for our mothers to carry us and birth us. That is a bond that can never be shaken. Perhaps this is why children who are put up for adoption long to know their birth mothers, the person who comforted them with her heartbeat for nine months.

But, this kind of closeness brings a lot of pressure. And ultimately, the bond with our children is imperfect because we are imperfect. And it's in these imperfections that the "mother church" help.

In the New Testament, Christ is often referred to as the bridegroom and the church as his bride. But let's take this metaphor a little further. If the church is the bride to Christ, she therefore is the "mother" to this world, this country, this state, this community. We, the church, are all called to be mothers. We are called to nourish one another, just as a mother gives milk to her infant. We are all called to hold one another when we're hurting, just as a mother tells her baby he or she will be alright. We must take care of this Earth which our creator gave to us to plow and tend. We must care for those who cannot care for themselves. The elderly, the infants, the orphans, the widows *and* widowers. We, as a mother church, are given a great responsibility. We aren't all mothers in the literal sense, but we all have an opportunity to love each other wholeheartedly, just as Christ loves us. Just as our mothers try their best to love us.

I encountered this kind of love when I attended the Church Women United fashion show, which we hosted here at our church. I was honored to participate, along with my daughter, Justa. She and I, with other women from the other churches that participate in the local chapter, modeled clothing, all from The Thrift Shop that is operated by the Church Women United. Justa modeled a lively pink, tulle dress, and I a pleated khaki skirt and floral top. We were served lunch and I had the pleasure of getting to know women I didn't know that well. And I was moved to know these women came together and gave their time and money to put on a fun show whose proceeds help the Church Women United Childcare Center. It was an authentic experience of motherly love through the "mother church."

The lectionary reading for today was from John 14:1-14. I want to reread verses 1-4 here.

The words of Jesus here are powerful. In these verses, he is speaking with Thomas and Phillip, two of the twelve disciples. Jill Duffield, the editor for The Presbyterian Outlook,

writes, "knowing their weaknesses and limits, he doesn't pile on; he builds up. It is, perhaps, a pattern we might try to emulate in these punitive, too often graceless times."

Jesus words here are direct, yet mysterious. He's speaking with authority, yet doing it in a loving way. And it's his actions that I was drawn to the most, along with Thomas and Philip's *re*-actions. Imagine Jesus sitting on the floor somewhere, probably outside, with Thomas and Philip in front of him. Perhaps their discussion was simple at first, but something Jesus said "troubled" these two men. They felt uneasy. Their hearts quickened, and their palms became sweaty. Maybe their eyes widened, as they tried to understand the magnitude of Jesus' words, yet they still seemed to miss the point. But Jesus' tone throughout the entirety of the conversation is calm. Reassuring. Matter-of-fact even when Philip demands proof so he can be satisfied in his own way.

Jesus' demeanor is of openness. His patience in trying to explain what he means by the phrase that he's "the way, the truth, and the life," is what I'm drawn to here, on this Mother's Day. His actions mirror the love that mothers try their best to offer us. I know my mother has done this for me countless times, when I felt lost and called her, crying because I was hurting or trying to figure out my purpose and the direction I needed go. Jesus doesn't bully Thomas and Phillip for asking questions. He sits there with an open mind and heart because he knows the truth will come to fruition. For me, as a new mother, Jesus presence here is a reminder of the patience I need whenever Justa will come to me when searching for answers to life's big questions. I only hope I can help her, *in this way*, along her path of understanding.

While Jesus wasn't a woman or a mother, we mothers can look to him as the perfect example of perfect love. He loves us despite our sin. He *died* for us despite our brokenness. And because of his death we no longer have to stay in the dark. Just as a mother provides a night light for her child when they are scared, our loving Jesus gives us the opportunity to live in the "now," to not be afraid of the shadows lurking. We can forget our mistakes and live free knowing that the future is bright and every opportunity is a chance to dwell in the light.

Mother's Day is important because we all came from a mother and therefore understand the connection between mother and child, even if it's complicated. So, on this day, as we celebrate those that carried us for nine months and birthed us for however long it took, enduring excruciating pain, but doing it because of they love us, let's honor them and learn from them and those who might have taken their place. And for those who may want to be a mother, but can't, or haven't gotten there yet, please know the "mother church" loves you and cherishes you, that your struggles aren't forgotten or unnoticed. And to ALL mothers, ALL women, please know that Jesus loves you and upholds you for the beautiful creations you are and what you do for this world.

Happy Mother's Day!