

Easter 6A

John 14:15-21

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There are those who say that preaching on Mother's Day is a trap. It can be like walking barefoot across a floor littered with Lego blocks- a challenge, to avoid verbal missteps that cause you to trip and fall. Long before becoming a deacon was on my radar, I heard a few Mother's Day sermons that caused me to make a mental note *"If I ever preach on Mother's Day, never ever say..."*

Our lectionary certainly helps avoid some of the pitfalls and today's Gospel reading seems fitting for Mother's Day. Jesus tells His disciples that he would not leave them orphaned and alone. He would dwell with them always. He says, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate." In the original Greek, the word translated here as 'Advocate' is 'paraclete'. Literally, it means called alongside, but it is a word full of nuances. It can be translated as Advocate, Comforter, Counselor, Friend, Defender, and Helper. These are all jobs that moms do on a regular basis.

There is little about being a mom that is easy. Many days it seems that you are a jack of all trades but master of none. Motherhood is filled with joy and pain. It encompasses a wide range of experiences for both mothers and their children. While many of these have a commonality, they are totally unique to the individual.

On Mother's Day, by and large, we tend to celebrate the joys of motherhood. The wonder of holding your newborn child. The special feeling that swells in your heart when you are given handmade cards and pictures made from macaroni glued onto construction paper. The fierce hugs, late night conversations, and the simple happiness of being present with your children. There are many joys of motherhood that we celebrate on this day.

We tend to ignore or at least often fail to acknowledge that for many, Mother's Day also brings the pains of motherhood into sharp focus. As hard as it may be, it is important we remember that motherhood isn't always filled with happiness. Becoming a mother isn't easy and for some it means navigating the long and difficult road of infertility. Then too, there are those with broken dreams of being a mother to their own children. Not all mothers love unconditionally, there are children who have suffered abuse by their mother or have felt unloved, uncared for, or unwanted. The relationship between mother and child can be tenuous leaving us distanced from our children, feeling unseen or heartbroken by them. There are times when we must stand by helplessly as our children battle illness. When the time comes for our children to follow their

own path out into the world, we are happy for them but saddened by the emptiness of our nest. When we lose a child through death, miscarriage, failed adoption, or by running away, there is a part of us that is always missing; a hole that will never be filled. There is the remembrance of mothers who have gone to join the saints in their heavenly kingdom.

In the shortest verse in the Bible, they tell us, “Jesus wept.” With every fiber of my being, I believe that Jesus weeps with all who suffer, are in pain, and mourn. May all who experience the many pains of motherhood feel the loving arms of Jesus embrace you in a fierce hug bringing you comfort and peace.

There is little about being a mother that is simple. Even the definition of mother or mom is complex, as it goes far beyond a simple biological relationship. At the recent Norman Pride Festival there was a booth for ‘free mom hugs.’ But it was the sign at the ‘free dad hugs’ booth that caught my eye. On their sign they had the following: He/Her/They/”Dad”. The same phrasing applies to moms: She/Him/They/”Mom”.

Being a mom is something you do. The definition can’t be constrained by tradition or biology. Moms and mothers are greater than any cultural norm. For all those who identify as a mother or mom, we honor and celebrate you. For those who are foster moms, mentor moms, and spiritual moms- remember that it takes a village of moms to raise a child. We rejoice that you are present for God’s children. For those who are stepmoms, have a stepmom, or live in a blended family – we walk with you on this complex path. Remember to love each other as God loves you.

For all who have weathered the storms of motherhood, both physical and metaphorical, you are stronger than you know. We see your courage and your bravery. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are with you always. May you take these words into your heart and believe that you are not alone. May you trust that they walk beside you as you navigate the messiness of motherhood. When you weep, they weep with you. When you rejoice, they rejoice with you. When you feel lost and alone, they are there to comfort you.

Both the Holy Spirit and Jesus are paracletes in the lives of all God’s children. Remember that Jesus said he would ask for *another* advocate. The Holy Spirit continues the work that Jesus began when he showed us how to walk the way of love as an advocate, comforter, counselor, friend, defender, and helper. Jesus walks with us, the Holy Spirit guides us, but we do the work of spreading the Good News of love to the world around us.

As a community of faith, we are called to be paracletes to all God’s children. One of my favorite ministries is the ministry of presence- coming beside someone else and just being there, allowing and trusting the Holy Spirit to work through us to provide what they need at that moment. Being present for someone isn’t always as easy as it sounds, but it is an effort that can be life-changing and soul-lifting for both of you. It means taking time to stop and really listen, even if it means listening to silence, because sometimes, we just need the comfort of another human being beside us. As someone once said, “To the world you may be one person, but to one person you may be the world.”

Jesus and the Holy Spirit dwell within us, but we are their faces and their hands in the world. Together, we can bring comfort and peace to those around us. Together, we help our brothers, our sisters, and ourselves experience the joy and love of the risen Christ. Take the time to be a paraclete to someone- an advocate, a comforter, a counselor, a friend, a defender, or a helper.

When we become these for each other, we join in the divine dance of the Holy Trinity. Our actions allow the Holy Spirit to start spreading seeds of hope and peace. The love of Christ that we share with others help them to feel the loving arms of Jesus enfold them, so that they may know the healing power of His love.

Amen