

MOTHER'S DAY AND PENTECOST

May 11, 2008

Post Presbyterian Church

John 20: 19-23

As we all know, today is Mother's Day and in the United States, Mother's Day is always celebrated on the second Sunday in May. When I Googled, "Mother's Day," I went to the Wikipedia website and discovered that Mother's Day in the U.S. was first introduced by Julia Ward Howe after the American Civil War and was intended as a call to unite women against war. In 1870, she wrote the Mother's Day Proclamation as a call for peace and disarmament. Although Howe failed in her attempt to get formal recognition of a Mother's Day for Peace, Howe's efforts influenced a young Appalachian homemaker named Ann Jarvis who began to work to reconcile Union and Confederate neighbors. When Ann Jarvis died in 1907, her daughter, Anna Jarvis successfully started the crusade to found a memorial day for women and the first Mother's Day was celebrated in Ann Jarvis's hometown of Grafton, West Virginia, on May 10, 1908.

In 1914 President Woodrow Wilson declared the first national Mother's Day, as a day for American citizens to show the flag in

honor of those mothers whose sons had died in war. Nine years after the first official Mother's Day, commercialization of the U.S. holiday became so rampant that Anna Jarvis herself became a major opponent of what the holiday had become.

From this brief history lesson, it is obvious that the commercialization of Mother's Day got out of hand early on and the intended meaning of the celebration was lost almost from the beginning. According to IBISWorld, a publisher of business research, Americans will spend approximately \$2.6 billion on flowers, \$1.53 billion on pampering gifts — like spa treatments — and another \$68 million on greeting cards. Mother's Day will generate about 7.8% of the US jewelry industry's annual revenue in 2008. Americans are expected to spend close to \$3.51 billion in 2008 on eating out on Mother's Day and the National Restaurant Association says Mother's Day is now the most popular day of the year to dine out at a restaurant in the United States.

It may be heretical for me to say this, but I don't really like Mother's Day. I have found from both personal and professional experiences that Mother's day stirs up a whole bunch of guilt and hurt and pain for many people who did not have a wonderful

loving mother, who may have had their mother die at an early age or who may have never been able to have children. This week I visited with a couple whose unborn baby girl died at 23 weeks because of a heart defect and in the midst of her tears and their great loss, this young woman acknowledged how difficult Mother's Day would be for her now. On Friday when I picked Katherine up from school, one of the teachers at Roscoe Wilson wished me a Happy Mother's Day and when I thanked her and told her how I've realized Mother's Day is hard for many people, she hugged me and burst into tears and talked about the difficult relationship she has always had with her mother and how she has never felt loved or cared for by one of the most important people in her life.

Mother's Day and Father's Day, for that matter, can be hard "when grief and loss of what was or might have been is stronger than the reality of what has been good and loving and cherished in a person's life." In a profound sermon preached on Father's Day in 2002, (June 16th) entitled, "**Parenting Hope**," the Rev. Dana Ferguson talked about launching a campaign to change Mother's Day and Father's Day to Parent's Day. She said that Parent's Day would be designed to be about the family of faith, the Christian

community, and the faith that has been entrusted to us. I believe that as children of God and followers of Jesus Christ, we have each been called to be caretakers of creation and nurturers of the human spirit in our midst, a sort of parent of the faith that has been entrusted to us. Whether or not we have children, we all function as mothers and fathers in our world when we use our passions, energies, and talents in the service of others and in the healing of our lives.

Dana Ferguson is the Executive Associate Pastor at the Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago and while she won't have any success in changing Mother's Day and Father's Day to Parent's Day, her message will provide hope, comfort and challenge to those of us who share her sentiments and long for another way to give thanks for the many people in our lives who have nurtured our souls and loved us into being.

In her sermon, Dana Ferguson illustrated how the church and the Christian community have acted as parents, caregivers, and harbingers of hope and healing through the years to those who most needed it. Dana Ferguson told about the profound worship experience she had when she was invited to attend the service at St

Paul's Chapel in New York City that commemorated the closing of Ground Zero about eight months after September 11th. "As you may remember, St Pauls' was the closest church to the World Trade Center and it became a central hub for the relief and recovery workers after September 11th. The chapel was open seven days a week for 24 hours a day providing food, cots, coffee, shelter, even massages and doctor's care. More than 3000 meals were served each day, 40,000 in all, and countless greetings from around the world were received and displayed at St Paul's.

This small chapel with a balcony circling the main floor was transformed into a multi-service facility. There was a pharmacy table, with aspirin, cough syrup, and whatever else you might need for what ailed you; a clothing table where fresh socks and boots were as plenty as sweatshirts, scarves and gloves; a coffee table; and even a health table staffed by a podiatrist. The service that grew with popularity as the weeks dragged on was massage therapy. As people become more and more comfortable in their surroundings, shedding more and more clothing for their massages, more and more privacy panels were set up. And upstairs in the balconies were cots for sleeping."

Dana said that as people gathered for the private worship service for relief workers and volunteer, she had a very clear sense of

being an outsider. She had been invited to attend the service with a group of theologians from Auburn Seminary who sat in their pews and quietly observed as firefighters and police officers, clergy and volunteers filtered into the room, greeting one another. She said, "There were lots of hugs and long embraces. During the course of the service, six individuals were invited to share their reflections. A young police officer was the first to speak. Frank Accardi nervously unfolded sheets of notebook paper and shyly started to speak to the congregation gathered there. He talked first about 9/11—about standing outside the World Trade Center, watching the building crumble and thinking about, as he said it, his "beautiful sister-in-law dying inside the building." He still wore a button on his shirt with her picture. "I was angry," he said. "I was mad at God." He said it more than once. "I was mad at God." So he wasn't sure about coming to a church, wasn't sure about spending time in a chapel. But he came—for food and rest. Day after day, as he worked at the site, he came on breaks. And he came to know the staff and the volunteers of St. Paul's Church.

"You are my family," he said to them. "You have become my family, greeting me with warm food and open arms, smiles of welcome and care. St. Paul's has become family."

Dana proclaimed that St. Paul's had become new parents—parents

of hospitality and compassion, of service and giving, of hope and healing. This church had grown into parenthood as many of us do in the traditional sense: not sure what we're getting into, living it day by day, doing it the best we know how, and trusting God to bring good from it. St. Paul's had grown into parenthood as their family grew, some 5000 volunteers laboring there through the eight months, loving and giving the best they knew how."

In our gospel lesson for today, Jesus comes unexpectedly into the midst of a weary band of dispirited disciples who are left wondering what life holds for them now that Jesus has left them for good. Feeling lost and alone, they must now find their own way in this world. In this Pentecost account, Jesus breaks through their locked doors of cynicism, disillusionment and fear and addresses their grief by giving them the traditional middle Eastern greeting, "Peace be with you" which means, "May God give you every good thing." After greeting them with the gift of God's peace, the risen Jesus continues, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when Jesus had said this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit!"

The story of Pentecost is a reminder that God is actively present in our lives and in the life of the world and that God's holy spirit

continues to find ways to fill the void of our soul and send us on our way in this world as Christ's envoys and parents of the faith entrusted to our care. The lives that were changed at Ground Zero by the community of faith at St Paul's Church is a poignant reminder of how healing and new beginnings occur when we function as parents of faith and hope, compassion and hospitality, belief and possibility.

"This was our home," declared one of the construction workers at Ground Zero. "The people of St. Paul's have become my family," announced a firefighter. His first words had been, "I was angry with God. I couldn't believe what had happened around me. I couldn't believe the loss and anguish and devastation. I couldn't believe in God." "But God's people came to him, reaching out in a quiet shelter from the chaos, with a warm cup of coffee, a soft bed, reaching out to hold hands and share God's love, to claim the possibility of a different tomorrow. And that tomorrow came. The hope that was nurtured and loved grew up. The parents of faith shared freely and boldly. And disbelief became belief. Anger became thanksgiving. "Thank you," were Frank's words. "God is in this place." (Dana Ferguson)

On this Mother's Day and Pentecost Sunday, may we seek to be

parents of hope, believers of faith and harbingers of new life. The kingdom of God will be celebrated in our midst and all peoples will come together when we, as disciples of Jesus Christ, go into the world to love freely, to hold hands with those who suffer and to parent hope for all the world to see and believe. AMEN

PASTORAL PRAYER

Loving and Gracious God, we gather together on this beautiful morning hoping to experience a sense of your presence in our midst. On this Mother's Day, we have special gratitude for mothers and women in our lives that have nurtured our souls and reminded us again again of our infinite worth and value. We give thanks for the multitude of times they have been there for us and with us and for how their grace and love has given us strength and well-being for the long-haul of our lives. We pray for healing in the relationships with mothers that have been difficult and hurtful and may we be open to the gift and presence of other significant people who can show us the love of a mother. Remind us O God, that we all function as parents of the faith and love entrusted to us in our world when we use our passions, energies, and talents in the service of others and in the healing of our lives. We pray O God, for the courage to live lives of love and peace and generosity that reflect our gratitude to you for the gift of life we have been given and for the love and care and connections we experience in the ups and downs of life.

We ask O Lord that you would be with Sandra Alexander, Tyra and Sara and their families, the Christian Church, Jack's sisters and loved ones, and his many friends and coffee buddies as they grieve his sudden death and seek to begin anew with his great presence in their hearts. We give thanks for Jack's life and sense of humor and for the little things he said and did for others that made them feel loved and special. Remind us again of your grace and healing as this community mourns the passing of a loved one. Gather us all more fully into your love and purposes that our lives may reflect the love that has claimed us and the spirit that continues to surprise and startle us with new life. Let us pray together...

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