

On this Mother's Day I thought we could ponder a bit about mothers with the famous story about Ruth in the Bible. I don't know of too many people called Ruth anymore, but in years past, I know it was a popular name I heard for church women, and perhaps it has been more popular among our Jewish friends. It may have been popular in Christian families because Ruth was an ancestor of David, and so ultimately an ancestor of Jesus. But not just that... she, along with her mother-in-law Naomi are great examples of a strong bond of Love.

So Just a quick glimpse of the story...An Israelite family, due to famine, was in the neighboring country of Moab; Naomi's two sons become married to Moabite women, to Ruth and Orpah. Naomi's husband dies, and in time her two sons both die, leaving Naomi as a widow and without sons to help her. Naomi decides to return to Israel; Orpah stays in Moab, and Naomi tells Ruth to do the same, but Ruth says those famous words: Where you go I will go, your people shall be me people, and your God my God! Obviously they had a very close bond and Ruth was very brave and very loyal to her mother-in-law, to want to keep her company, in a new culture with new language and new ways of worshipping! Naomi also had a deep kind of love for her two daughters in law... to let them go, back to their own people and their own gods.

We know many people who have adopted a new religion or a new culture, to be part of the family they marry into. My older sister joined the Jewish faith and community out of love for her husband and for the sake of their children. Though she did this gladly and with theological resonance, (Your people will be my people and your God will be my God), there must have been some sense of loss or sacrifice to give up the familiar in order to learn many new ways.

Continuing with this theme of sacrifice: Parents, but yes, surely mothers, do sacrifice much to put time into child care. We hear of exhaustion everywhere due to the demands of raising children, especially if a mother is trying to keep working in a career at the same

time. Back in my childhood, my stay-home mother had all she could do to watch four kids, do cooking, laundry, sew and mend clothes, and check on homework, etc. One thing she made time for was to listen to us all practice our music. She was very proud of how much time and feedback she gave to each of us while we were practicing. All this giving of time and nurture may have come at the expense of some of her own desires and needs. Yet it did indeed make all the difference - to receive attention and encouragement when doing things like homework or practicing one's instrument.

For many of us, love from a mother or grandmother involves memories of FOOD! My siblings and I have saved some special recipes that my mom made. And one of my best memories is that when I got home from school at 3 or 3:30, my mom would often make me peanut butter on Ritz crackers.. or perhaps on a lucky day, peanut butter cookies! Now, my mom's mom, our Nana, knew that Mom was extremely thrifty, making us things like hamburger helper on noodles so once in a while, our Nana would come over and open her large pocketbook and present us kids with a prime cut of steak! And when I did my summer business of mowing lawns, one woman, Elda, who had no children, would treat me afterwards to cookies and lemonade, then ask me all about my college and career plans. And just one more example that comes to mind... in the realm of women who might be "like mothers" to us. As a top Spanish student with lots of questions, I got along really well with my eighth and ninth grade Spanish teacher, Mrs. Efthim. Well, in the first month of my freshman year at college, I found a note in my campus post office box, that said "package for you." I opened up the box and found a lovely can of mixed nuts with a note from my beloved Spanish teacher! At a time when things are all new and even a bit frightening, this "care package" was a bit of love and encouragement from one of my hometown "mothers", I'm sure I got a bit teary!

While Jesus is our primary model for love (Love as I have loved you), there is much to be said for the idea that love of a mother, or feminine love, often has the highest qualities of sacrifice and compassion. After all, we recall that Jesus said “I would have gathered you together like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.” And there is a reason why Roman Catholics venerate Mary... it is not worship of Mary per se, but a veneration or honoring of Mary’s spirit.. for her compassion, her steadfastness in caring for her son and doing her best to understand him.

There is the idea of the divine feminine in most all religions; most all of us are aware of the names of Roman goddesses.. like Diana, goddess of the hunt, or Venus, the goddess of Love. And I learned in my encounters with Hindu faith, that the Hindu pantheon has many goddesses known for different aspects of one supreme God... the one I recall most is Saraswati... who is their goddess of learning, art and music! Our Christian Science friends start the Lord’s Prayer with “Our Father-Mother God...” and many of my colleagues in the United Church of Christ refer to God, or at least to the Holy Spirit, as She or Her. And even though the Jewish faith insists on ONE God, the many varied qualities of God are named, while noting that they all are bound up in one God. The Christian Trinity still assumes ONE reality, while saying that this God appears to us in three principal aspects, or three qualities.

My point is that it is helpful for us to remember the “feminine” aspect of God, especially on this day. We remember in the very first chapter of Bible, Genesis Chapter 1, it says “God made us in God’s image: *male and female* God created them.” This implies that God can be considered both male and female. Being somewhat stereotypical, this can mean that God can be both powerful and mighty ... but also God can be gentle and compassionate. The feminine imagery may be harder to find in the Bible that was written in patriarchal times, but it surely is there. Just yesterday at the graveside for Carol Beauparlant, I read Psalm 131, the posture of a mother who sees the receptivity and

calm of the infant on her lap: “Like a child at it’s mother’s breast my soul is quieted.”

We know there are important insights these days about gender identity, gender fluidity, about people having both the feminine and the masculine spirit in them. Yet on a day when we honor our mothers and grandmothers, I think it’s helpful to ponder the title of a Psych 101 book we had in college: The Maternal-Infant Bond! There is a reality of carrying a child in your womb, suckling it at your breast, that, let’s face it... only mothers really experience! The maternal-infant bond is surely like no other, a kind of sacrificial giving and loving that men can only approximate!

So today I honor my own mother with this song that Enya composed for *her* mother:

*So I Could Find My Way*

A thousand dreams you gave to me, you held me high, you held me high. And all those years you guided me so I could find my way.

How long your love had sheltered me, you held me high, you held me high. A harbor holding back the sea, so I could find my way.

Yet only time keeps us apart, you held me high, you held me high.

You're in the shadows of my heart, so I can find my way.

*Refrain: So let me give this dream to you upon another shore. So let me give this dream to you each night and evermore.*