

## Mothers' Day 2016

Good morning, mothers, grandmothers and mothers-in-law, adoptive mothers, birth mothers, step-mothers, foster mothers, and all the many ways women are mother. Happy Mothers' Day.

Mothers are all about relationship, especially that very special and fragile and robust relationship between a woman and a child, no matter how the child comes into her life. These relationships change and grow over time. From a child's perspective, mothers can do no wrong until the time that they can do nothing right (a stage that can last for all of adolescence). Then, miraculously, mothers can become interesting people whose opinions and guidance are welcome. And, then, all too soon they may be gone.

A mother's perspective might follow a similar trajectory. From "what a lovely baby" to "what happened to that sweet little boy?" And later, perhaps, "I'd love to meet your new friend."

This is the tension that exists in a dynamic relationship. Just as we think we have it figured out, it changes.

Fortunately, in 2016, the cultural awareness of what mothers do is far more complete and nuanced than it was 40 or 50 years ago. Gone is the stereotype of a woman wearing a perfectly starched apron just waiting for the children to return from school and husband from work. Or the mother who has the able assistance of a live-in housekeeper. Mother's work is now understood to encompass a wide varied of jobs, from chief cook and executive housekeeper to day care teacher, psychologist, magistrate, nurse, to name but a few.

As a society, we're even better at measuring the economic worth of mothers. Did you know that, if a stay-at-home mom were paid for the value of her contribution to the household, she would make \$144,000 annually? That's a base pay of \$49,000 for 40 hours per week and \$95,000 for 52 hours of overtime per week. There is a different calculation for women who work outside the home but I'll leave that to you to check out at [www.salary.com](http://www.salary.com).

Honoring mothers one day a year is the least that we can do. The original idea for a national mothers' day holiday grew out of the work of Ann Jarvis of West Virginia, an activist who cared for wounded soldiers on both sides of the American Civil War and who created mothers' organizations to address public health issues. (She was someone who would have been right at home here at All Saints.) In 1908, her daughter, Anna Jarvis, started a campaign to make Mothers' Day a national holiday to honor her remarkable mother and women like her who nurture and care for the human family. In 1914, President Woodrow Wilson signed a proclamation designating the second Sunday in May as a national holiday to honor mothers.

What was obvious to Anna Jarvis is probably obvious to many of us here: mothers do great things in the world, in addition to their 92 hours each week of

uncompensated work. They can be a powerful political force and can challenge the status quo when no one else thinks it possible. Nowhere is this more evident than when mothers come together as one and take public action out of grief for the loss of a child. Three examples come to mind.

- A group of mothers changed American culture about driving while intoxicated. Channeling their grief at the death of their children to drunk drivers, Mothers Against Drunk Driving forced law-makers across the country to strengthen laws that would reduce the incidence of driving while intoxicated. Before MADD, people shook their heads in sadness and resignation when a repeat drunk driver caused a fatal accident but it took the righteous anger of grieving mothers to get something done.
- Grief at the disappearance of their sons and daughters during the “dirty war” in Argentina in the 1970s led to the formation of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. In defiance of the government policy and practices, the Mothers stood up to a brutal dictatorship and protested publicly in the plaza opposite the presidential palace in Buenos Aires, demanding to know what had happened to their children.
- When leaders of the Mothers themselves began to be “disappeared” by the military dictatorship, a new group, the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo was formed to locate children stolen and illegally adopted during the same “dirty war.”

The stories of mothers doing amazing things are also part of scripture. Some of the stories we may know better than others. We all know about Eve, the mother of us all. And, Mary, the God-bearer, the mother of Jesus, who, as a very young woman, said yes to an extraordinary proposal.

We may be less familiar with the story from Exodus of Pharaoh’s daughter who rescued the infant Moses from the river Nile and took him as her son. She was an adoptive mother who contradicted her father’s edict to kill all the male Hebrew children. This mother, who doesn’t even have a name in scripture, saved the child who would grow up to lead the Hebrew people out of bondage in Egypt.

The Book of Ruth tells the story of Naomi and her daughter-in-law, Ruth, both of who were left destitute and isolated by the deaths of their husbands and sons. When Naomi tells her two daughters-in-law to go back to their mothers’ families for their own safety and security, Ruth refuses, choosing to stay with Naomi. Together, they navigate the journey from Moab to Bethlehem, surviving and ultimately thriving. Without the protection of a husband or son, these two women were extremely vulnerable but, joining forces, they supported and cared for each other and when Ruth married and had a son, Naomi was an honored member of the household. And the son Ruth bore was the grandfather of the great King David.

For me, what ties these stories together is that they give life to the words of today's gospel. Jesus prays that his followers "may all be one (John 17.21)." Or, as translated in The Message

"the goal is for all of them to become one heart and mind—just as you Father are in me and I in you, so they might be one heart and mind with us."

Mothers are all about relationship. Relationship with the children and adults in their lives, with neighbors who need help, with strangers who need care. And all of us who follow their example show the world what it means to be one heart and one mind with God.

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