

Love, Holy Spirit, and Mother's Day
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Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

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The Gospel reading for today has only seven verses in John 14. It follows what had been an event-filled night for Jesus' disciples. It is the same night that Jesus would be betrayed and begin His Passion leading to His death. The disciples have already seen and heard some startling things. Jesus had lowered Himself to the level of a servant and washed their feet. He announced that one of them would betray Him, and He identified the betrayer as Judas Iscariot. He instituted the Lord's Supper. Then, Jesus delivered a sermon to teach His disciples. It was His last teaching before He died. In that sermon, Jesus told His disciples that He was giving them a new commandment. The commandment was that they were to love one another. Then, Jesus told Peter that before the next morning, he would deny knowing Jesus three times. After that startling announcement, He told His disciples, as we heard in last week's Gospel, that He was going away, and His disciples could not follow Him. He also told them, as we heard last week, that He was the way, the truth, and the life for where He was going. This stunning set of events and predictions by Jesus probably confounded and confused His disciples. And now, we come to the seven verses that Jesus spoke next.

The words are few, but the implication and the effect are as stunning as everything else about this night. Jesus said that if His disciples loved Him, and who among them did now that

Judas had left, they would obey His commandments. Jesus was not giving a new set of commandments or reinventing the Ten Commandments that had been given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Jesus' words sound like what many mothers (and fathers) have heard before. Children tend to have a different purpose than Jesus intended it. They try to leverage love to get their way. Maybe you have done that to your mother (or father). Have you ever said, "If you love me, you'll buy me this or that thing", or "if you really love me, you'll let me do this or that"? Of course, that is manipulation and laying a guilt trip on one's parents. How is your conscience?

That is not what Jesus had in mind. Jesus was not trying to twist the arms of His disciples (or us) or to manipulate His followers to get certain things done. Jesus was saying that our love for Him is demonstrated in our behavior toward each other. Showing our love for Jesus is clearly apparent in the way we treat others and deny ourselves, just as Jesus did when He washed His disciples' feet and when He willingly went to the cross taking the punishment meant for us for our sins so we could take our place in heaven with Him. Later, in His teaching in the next chapter, Jesus says, "Love one another as I have loved you." He also says, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down their life for his friends. You (each of us) are my friends if you do what I command you . . . that you love one another."

The Greek word "*agapao*" is translated into the English word "love." But its meaning is much greater than that simple meaning. Jesus was telling His disciples, and us, to deliberately

subjugate our will on behalf of others just as He did. His command to do this is the behavior which He says will measure our commitment and acceptance of Him. Whenever Jesus says something, we should listen to Him. But when He says something twice, which He did in both the opening verse (v. 15) and again in verse 22, He was clearly insistent that we obey His command to love one another. This is how Jesus said we should spend our time and ourselves as His followers in this world.

And that is how the woman for whom Mother's Day was established spent her time and herself. That mother's name was Anna Reeves Jarvis. She lived about 185 miles west of here in Grafton, West Virginia. It is about 25 miles south of Morgantown. In the 1850s, Anna Jarvis formed groups of ladies in her town called "Mother's Work Day Clubs." The purpose of these clubs was to provide medicine for poor people who could not afford it, inspect milk to make sure it was safe for children to drink, provide nursing care for people who were ill, and run shelters for children who had tuberculosis. When the Civil War broke out, Anna Reeves Jarvis called upon her clubs to make a pledge that friendship and good would not be a casualty of the war. Throughout that war, Ms. Jarvis, and the women of her clubs, nursed soldiers from both sides and were credited with saving many lives. After the war, Ms. Jarvis organized "Mothers' Friendship Days" to reconcile families from the North and the South (especially in West Virginia) who had been torn apart by the war. By her actions, Ms. Jarvis demonstrated the love Jesus had urged His disciples to show in obedience to Him. Her daughter, also named Anna, was inspired by her mother, Anna Reeves Jarvis. The daughter had witnessed the

actions of her mother when she was a child and teenager. In 1907, two years after her mother's death, she organized the first "Mother's Day" in Grafton, to honor the work she had done in her life and promote its continuation. She spent the next 8 years campaigning to make "Mother's Day" a national event. She convinced President Woodrow Wilson to do just that, and he proclaimed the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day. Today is the second Sunday in May. It's Mother's Day.

So, the central purpose of Mother's Day was not only to remember and honor mothers in obedience to the Fourth Commandment but also to recognize the deepest love possible as seen in the life of one woman—a mother, a Christian woman who was obedient to the command of Jesus to love as He had loved her, and all mothers likewise—by her daughter.

On the night of this Gospel reading, Jesus knew that soon He would physically leave His disciples temporarily while He was in the tomb. He also knew that within five weeks, He would physically leave them permanently at His ascension. Yet, He promised them, and us, that He would not abandon them in this temporal world. He used the metaphor like "orphans." He promised that He would ask God, the Father, to send them a Helper. Notice, this word is capitalized in the reading. The Greek word is "*parakletos*." It is a compound word made up of a Greek word that means "I call" and a Greek word that means "alongside or next to." So, the literal meaning is "someone called to be beside you, to stand next to you." However, this word does not translate well into English. It includes the meaning of a lawyer who stands beside you in court as an

advocate or a witness who testifies on your behalf. It means the person who comes to comfort you when you are in deep grief. If you are struggling with a project, it means the one who helps you see your way to the completion of that project. If you are stranded in an empty parking lot at 2:00 a.m. on a bitter-cold night, it is the one who gets out of their cozy warm bed and comes with jumper cables to get your car started. If you are on the battlefield, it is the one who throws their helmet on a hand grenade and then falls on the helmet. If you are wounded, it is the medic. If you are dying, the one who stays with you, so you do not die alone. The meaning of the word includes all of these and is more than just a “helper.” Jesus tells His disciples and us: *This is the one who I will send, and He will be with you forever.*

I want you to notice that Jesus said He will ask His Father to send “another” Helper, “another paraclete.” This is the second one. Who is the first? Jesus Himself. And then, Jesus tops it all off with words that are overwhelming. He says that we will not be able to see this “Helper,” but because we have faith, we will know His presence. This “Helper,” the Holy Spirit, will dwell within each of us and we will experience Him in us. And that is not all. Jesus says that those who are obedient to Him, those who show love as He shows it, will recognize that Jesus is one with God, the Father, and at the same time they will be at one with Him. The Father with the Son. The Son with us and the Holy Spirit with us. The Trinity will become a Qaudrinity. How powerful is that! And you know that this is possible. You became one of God’s children in Holy Baptism just as Holly and Ian will today. And, you know that you become one with Jesus in the Sacrament of the Altar. Love binds us together with

Jesus and with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. Love binds us together as children of God, just as we are bound together with our mothers before our births.

There is a story about a mother who was trying to get her three-year-old son to take a nap. He was “unobliging” and so she decided to put him on her bed and lay down with him to encourage him. She fell asleep, but he didn’t. When she suddenly woke up, she saw her son sitting on a chair next to the bed. She asked him, “Son, what are you doing?” The boy answered, “I’m playing God.” Startled, the mom blurted out, “Playing God!” “Yes,” the boy said. “I’m watching over you while you sleep.”

Sometimes we do not give children enough credit for understanding spiritual things. Jesus gave the promise of the Holy Spirit. Not only would the “Helper” stand beside us and be with us in our daily lives, as that little boy, but through and with His presence in us, He reminds us of what it means to be obedient to Jesus: The “Helper,” the Holy Spirit, helps us to see our sins, confess them, and trust in Jesus as our Savior. Mothers do the same: They confront us when we do wrong; they tell us to say we are sorry; and they point us to our Savior Jesus. The Holy Spirit, the “Helper,” prods us to “Love as God first loved us.” By the power of that unseen-but-clearly-present Holy Spirit, we are provided the means to create an environment of love, grace, faith, and security that is needed in our lives and the lives of people around us. That was what Anna Reeves Jarvis did. That is often what mothers do. The challenge is to

listen to the word of the Spirit and in obedience, trust in Jesus and The Spirit, who Jesus calls the Spirit of Truth.

Today is Mother's Day. For most, it is a happy day. Children, young and old, show their appreciation and gratitude for loving mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and others who serve as mothers to them. Today's Gospel is not about maternal characters in our lives, but it is about love. And love is the key ingredient for being a good mother. So, today is about maternal love that is similar to the love of God, the Holy Spirit, as the Helper, the Paraclete. A mom is a Helper, a Comforter, a Counselor, a Confronter, and, at times, an Intercessor.

But today is not a happy day for everyone. For some, their mother was absent or not so loving. Some women are unable to have children and for some, including me, their mother has died. These all need to feel our love as disciples of Jesus.

For me, personally, this is a day of mixed emotions. My mom, a faithful saint of the Church, died eleven years ago and is in heaven. She always wanted me to be a pastor, and I didn't listen to her at first. Unfortunately, she never heard me preach a sermon or lead the liturgy of worship service. But I was blessed to have her in my life, and I remember her today for being a "Helper" in my life, and especially for her faith, which she valued highly, and passed on to my brother and me. Like all your mothers, she gave me physical life, but by her teaching and example of obedience to the commandments of Jesus, she also showed the means to eternal life to my brother and me.

On this Mother's Day, may you hear the words of Jesus to follow His commandments, and show your love in some way to the one who was your "Helper," your mother, or the one who God gave you as your mother. And in obedience to Jesus, show that same love by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Helper, to those who He places before you.

With gratitude and thanksgiving for my mother and all the loving, caring, self-sacrificing moms who are obedient to Jesus' command to love. Amen.