

YEAR A-6 EASTER

TODAY IS MOTHER'S DAY.

And I wish a very happy Mother's Day to those who are mother's or have mothers.

And I also want to acknowledge that this day is not always joyful for many people for many reasons.

This was case for me for many years until I became a mother myself.

As many of you know,

My own mother died of leukemia when I was fourteen,

But I am tremendously grateful to many women

Who have mothered me over the years

I am especially grateful to Nancy Penland

Who lived up the street from us

Who took very seriously Jesus' commandment

To love thy neighbor

By taking my sisters and I into her home

By loving and caring for us

After the death of my mother.

I'm also grateful to my stepmother, Ginny Kilpack,
Has also been an extraordinarily loving presence in my life.

Ginny has been my stepmom for over 20 years
And I'd like to share a specific story about her
Today on Mother's Day
Because I think it embodies
What Jesus is talking about in our Scripture today
About his love for us
And his promise to leave us with an Advocate
The Holy Spirit
Which guides us
And loves us
And walks besides us always.

When my father was planning his wedding to Ginny many years ago
He asked me to sing at the wedding.
I love to sing
My father asked to me sing two songs
One was "I Know that my redeemer liveth" from Handel's Messiah
And the other was Shubert's "Ave Maria"

Though these are both beautiful songs
I was feeling a bit torn about them.
Now, these songs were like – my mom's songs
My mother had a beautiful voice and
These are songs she was famous for singing in my family.

As I prepared the songs and the wedding drew closer
I started to feel really uncomfortable about singing these songs...
That my dead mother used to sing.
I felt like a stand-in for her
Which made me feel sad
Because it made me remember her death
And this was for an event that was supposed to be joyful.

So about a week before the wedding
I called my father to talk it over with him.
Basically, to complain...

Why was he asking me sing these very emotionally loaded songs?

My father listened patiently
And like a good father,
He tried to solve the problem.
He said, “Ok. Why don't you sing something else.”

But I was upset with this very practical solution!
Because it did really address the feelings I had
Also,
The wedding was a week away!
What was I going sing?
I had no time to learn anything else.

Then my dad did what he still does with some frequency,
usually when he doesn't know what to say
He said, “Here, why don't you talk to Ginny.”
...and hands her the phone.

Ginny gets on the phone
And says something to me that is
To this day
Perhaps the single most loving thing anyone has said to me.
With great gentleness and kindness...

She said
“Hi Lilo.

I overheard what your conversation with your father...

You know, I've been a step parent before,
(this was true,...
her late husband had been married twice before he married her
And she already had four adult stepchildren)

She said:
I've been a step parent before and
Sometimes when your parent gets remarried
You can have all sorts of feelings about it.

I just want you to know
That whatever you feel
There is room for it.”

This sort of love is what Jesus means when he tells us to keep his commandments.

This is love of others that flows from the love of God.

Ginny could have reacted in all sorts of ways
about my feeling upset about these songs

She could have judged me.

She could have gotten defensive

She could have been annoyed because I wasn't expressing enthusiasm
about her upcoming wedding

She could have changed the subject and ignored me altogether.

But what she offered was love and acceptance...

an assurance that I was seen and accepted by her no matter what.

And I know for certain that her love was rooted...

in her deep faith in Jesus Christ.

This passage in John is when Jesus is saying a long good bye to the disciples.

He is saying that Holy Spirit – the Advocate

Will come to us

To comfort us

Guide us

To be the presence of Jesus and God here on earth

When he is gone physically.

The Holy Spirit is not some sort of floaty ghost

Drifting around

The Holy Spirit works through US

If we let it

The Gospel says:

The Holy Spirit abides with you, and he will be in you.

I believe the Holy Spirit worked through Ginny that day

Because what she said

Healed me

Just being given the permission to feel whatever it was I was feeling

About my father being remarried

(Because that really was the root of it all)

Just being given the space...

to feel whatever I felt

and be loved no matter what

Well, that was like 10 years of therapy right there.

And I did go on to sing those songs at the wedding – happily.

This love lived out

is what Jesus means when he says

because I live, you also will live

He's talking about the fullness of life that we have

When we allow him – through the Holy Spirit – into our hearts

And into our actions.

He's talking about the generosity and expansiveness

that happens with presence of God's love.

The Holy Spirit is in each and every one of us
We actually can't escape it.
We can't escape God...
who Paul describes in our reading from Acts as:
*the God in whom we live
and move
and have our being.*

We can't escape God
But we can choose to turn toward God
Or turn away from God.

Imagine what this divided world would be like
If we could say to people with whom we disagree...
to people who were coming at us with things we didn't want to hear...

...and say:
Hey, whatever you are feeling, there is room for that.

That is radical peacemaking.

This is not say that we should tolerate all actions...
things like violence and discrimination and bigotry and abuse...
But how many of these destructive actions could be healed and avoided...
If we could just give others the room to feel what they feel...
...to be seen and understood with love and compassion.
Maybe then those feelings could be acted out constructively.

Today I ask you...

Where in your life can let the Holy Spirit open your heart
to create room for someone else to have feelings that you find inconvenient?
Where can you let go of judgement and control toward someone else?

Maybe it's someone with different politics than yours?
Maybe it's a relative you have a lot of opinions about?

Where in your life can you let the God of love
give you the grace to be more loving and less reactive?

I leave you today with words that are attributed to the great saint,
Teresa of Avila.

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which He looks with
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which He blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are His body.
Christ has no body now but yours,

Amen.