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*God is not a white man*

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Today is Mother’s Day. Mother’s Day is a day of joy for many, but also a day of pain for many. I want to share with you something that Amy Young wrote on her blog messymiddle.com. It is called “The Wide Spectrum of Mothering.”

“To those who gave birth this year to their first child—we celebrate with you.

To those who lost a child this year – we mourn with you.

To those who are in the trenches with little ones every day and wear the badge of food stains – we appreciate you.

To those who experienced loss through miscarriage, failed adoptions, or running away—we mourn with you.

To those who walk the hard path of infertility, fraught with pokes, prods, tears, and disappointment – we walk with you. Forgive us when we say foolish things. We don’t mean to make this harder than it is.

To those who are foster moms, mentor moms, and spiritual moms – we need you.

To those who have warm and close relationships with your children – we celebrate with you.

To those who have disappointment, heart ache, and distance with your children – we sit with you.

To those who lost their mothers this year – we grieve with you.

To those who experienced abuse at the hands of your own mother – we acknowledge your experience.

To those who lived through driving tests, medical tests, and the overall testing of motherhood – we are better for having you in our midst.

To those who have aborted children - we remember them and you on this day.

To those who are single and long to be married and mothering your own children - we mourn that life has not turned out the way you longed for it to be.

To those who step-parent - we walk with you on these complex paths.

To those who envisioned lavishing love on grandchildren, yet that dream is not to be – we grieve with you.

To those who will have emptier nests in the upcoming year – we grieve and rejoice with you.

To those who placed children up for adoption – we commend you for your selflessness and remember how you hold that child in your heart.

And to those who are pregnant with new life, both expected and surprising –we anticipate with you.

This Mother’s Day, we walk with you. Mothering is not for the faint of heart and we have real warriors in our midst. We remember you.” Thank you for those words, Amy Young.

Did you know that Mother’s Day has its roots with a Methodist laywoman? In May 1907, Methodist Anna Jarvis passed out 500 white carnations at her church to commemorate the life of her mother. Anna Jarvis’ mom, Ann, was a peace activist who had cared for wounded soldiers on both sides of the Civil War and created Mother’s Day Work Clubs to address public health issues. She taught Sunday School in the final decades of her life. When her mom died in 1905, Anna Jarvis began [petitioning for a national holiday](http://www.nwhp.org/news/history_of_mothersday.php) in celebration of mothers everywhere. She sent letters to President William Taft and former President Theodore Roosevelt and one year after Anna Jarvis passed out the 500 white carnations to commemorate the life of her mother, Anna’s Methodist church created a special service to honor mothers. The YMCA and the World Sunday School Association picked up the cause and lobbied Congress to make Mother's Day a national holiday. And, in 1914, President Woodrow Wilson made it official and signed Mother's Day into law. So, today is the 100th anniversary of Mother’s Day!

We see Mother’s Day as this sentimental holiday, but it did not start out that way. The first Mother’s Day was actually in 1870 when anti-war activist Julia Ward Howe realized that perhaps the one group who would have a voice in the struggle to end war were mothers. You see, Julia had written the “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” a song that eventually become the anthem of the Union Army. But as the Civil War continued and casualties mounted, she became increasingly uneasy that her song was being used to justify aggression and killing.

As the Civil War ended, Julia Ward Howe was hopeful that humankind would put an end to war once and for all. She thought everyone could see how bloody and senseless war was as a tool of diplomacy and change. She was sure humanity would find other ways to resolve disputes. But then there began to be rumors about a new war in Europe and the Franco-Prussian War soon broke out. Julia was devastated. How could humanity be so mindless?  Could anyone actually stop war? She thought about how war was decided by men and that it was women who suffered from the premature and senseless deaths of their sons, brothers, fathers, and husbands. In 1870 Julia Ward Howe wrote the first official “Mother’s Day Proclamation” and gatherings were organized around this proclamation in Boston, New York, and Paris.

Here’s a part of that first proclamation: “We will not have great questions decided by irrelevant agencies, our husbands will not come to us, reeking with carnage, for caresses and applause. Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy and patience. We, the women of one country, will be too tender of those of another country to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs. From the bosom of the devastated Earth a voice goes up with our own. It says: ‘Disarm! Disarm! The sword of murder is not the balance of justice.’ Blood does not wipe out dishonor, nor violence indicate possession.”

You may have thought that Mother’s Day is sentimental and sweet but the very first Mother’s Day was organized by a mother opposed to war. And Anna Jarvis who worked so hard to get a national Mother’s Day tried to get it rescinded as Hallmark and other companies started selling Mother’s Day cards. Anna organized boycotts and threatened lawsuits to try to stop the commercialization. She crashed a candymakers convention in Philadelphia in 1923. Two years later she protested at a gathering of the American War Mothers, which raised money by selling carnations, the flower associated with Mother’s Day, and was arrested for disturbing the peace.

Things are not always as we imagine.

You know when we think of God, we have these Grandpa or Santa images. Things are not always as we imagine because there is a lot of imagery and description in the Bible of God as a mother. God is described as a comforting mother in Isaiah 66:13, “As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you” and a nursing mother in Isaiah 49:15. God is seen as a woman in labor Isaiah 42:14, “For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labor, I will gasp and pant.” In Psalm 131:2 God is described as a mother weaning her child and in Matthew and in Luke Jesus describes himself as a mother hen (Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34). Jesus talking about the city of Jerusalem says, “How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.”

Throughout the Bible God is described as compassionate. In Hebrew it is the word raham which is also the word for womb. God is compassionate, God is womblike. This is a feminine image for God. A lot of people are comfortable with male imagery for God. God is the father, God is the warrior. God is the judge. God is the lawgiver. There is this great line in Job 38:29 where God is pointing out all the complexity and creativity of creation and God is asking Job who do you think made all this? God asks Job, from whose womb came the ice? Who gave birth to frost from the heavens? God’s answer to Job is God. God’s womb. God gave birth. It is poetry, but this is feminine imagery for God.[[1]](#footnote-2)

There is a masculine dimension to God and a feminine dimension to God. This imagery wants to make clear that God is active in our lives: nurturing, instructing, protecting, disciplining, nursing, serving, calming, enjoying, challenging, teaching, cleaning, entertaining, worrying over, singing over, playing with us. And since we are created in the image of God, we are called to care for one another. We are called to care for one another in our church family, called to care for our community and extend that care for one another around the globe. I believe that we all have responsibility to care for the children whom God puts in our lives. Caring for one another on Mother’s Day means acknowledging both the joy-filled and painful experiences of motherhood.

God brings forth new life and God nurtures us on our path. Today as we celebrate those who nurture us, may we remember all those who hurt this day. May we remember the families in Nigeria waiting to hear news about their girls. May we all pray for their safe return. May we hold their families in our hearts and may we show just a fraction of their courage in fighting to give every girl on this planet the education that is her birthright.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Some of you may have noticed my sermon title today, God is not a white man. There is a song titled “White Man” by Michael Gungor. Here are Michael’s words, “God is not a man. God is not a white man. God is not a man sitting on a cloud. God can not be bought. God will not be boxed in. God will not be owned by religion. God is love. God loves everyone. God is not a man. God is not an old man. God does not belong to republicans. God is not a flag. Not even American. And God does not depend on a government. But God is good. God is good. God loves everyone. Athetists and charletans, and communists and lesbians. And even old Pat Robertson. God loves us all. Catholic or Protestant. Terrorist or President. Everybody love. God is love.”[[3]](#footnote-4)

Things are not always as we imagine. But this I know for sure, God is love. Everybody love.

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWd6P3u9paU#t=89 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2014/05/10/weekly-address-first-lady-marks-mother-s-day-and-speaks-out-tragic-kidnapping-nigeri> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-WybvhRu9KU> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)