

## SERMON NOTES — May 12, 2024 — Happy Mother’s Day!

On this Mother’s Day, we will explore a *double irony*. The first Mother’s Day irony is that, in reading from both the Gospel of John and the Letter of John, we are reading from texts that use the word “Father” 121 times. One hundred twenty-one! This morning’s Gospel is a prayer from Jesus to his Father that we might be ‘kept’ in the Father’s name. In other words, Jesus is praying that we might be kept in our new *identities* as reborn children of Jesus’ God, whom he calls “Father.”

The second Mother’s Day irony is that Jesus’ God, whom he calls “Father,” is so completely different from our typical human gods that we might more truthfully call her “Mother,” because Jesus’ God is so completely about the power of love both to give life and then to help it flourish. Jesus’ God is about “boundless life.” Jesus’ God, John tells us, ***IS*** love.

First irony: 95% of the use of “Father” in John’s Gospel is John or Jesus himself referring to God as Father. The big exception is in John 8, where Jesus challenges those who name Abraham as their father, with these startling words:

“You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not have faith in me.” (John 8:44-45)

They are also dangerous words, because they been used by anti-Semitic “Christians” to justify lies and murders. Which is why we must understand them as an *anthropological* truth – a truth about our entire species from the beginning. (Recall the book we’ve studied, *The Ideas of René Girard*, edited by David Cayley.) We humans evolved with gods of violence to justify our violence. It requires Jesus to be murdered by us, and for God to raise him on Easter, to finally be able to glimpse the truth about ourselves — and to have the gracious opportunity to become human in a new way that’s faith to the God of love and life.

Early Christians lived this new identity of being ‘born of God’ through Jesus. They were largely nonviolent and loving in the violent, hateful world of the Roman Empire. Then, in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, Christians

began to ally themselves with empire and lapsed back into our evolved identity with the ‘world’s’ faith in gods of violence. It’s still alive today in Christian Nationalism.

Graciously, we have a new model given to us through the Hindu man Mahatma Gandhi, who once again took the identity given to us by Jesus, calling it by the Hindu name *Satyagraha*, the “Spirit of Truth.”

Telling stories about living in this new identity brings us back to the second Mother’s Day irony, that Jesus’s “Father” is so completely different from the world’s father (“Satan”) that she looks much more like a “Mother.” She’s all about life! Never death.

The story of Mother’s Day itself is a good example of working to bring healing, unity, and the flourishing of life. Look up Ann Reeves Jarvis, Julia Ward Howe, and Mother’s Day on the Internet, or check out the following sites as examples:

<https://www.almanac.com/content/history-mothers-day>

<https://www.history.com/topics/holidays/mothers-day>

I also have a TV recommendation: the PBS show *Call the Midwife* (also available to be streamed from Netflix and Prime Video). I’ve never seen a television show whose main characters have such a strong, dedicated identity to compassion and caring, to birthing and nurturing life.



Last week’s show ended by giving the Mother of the Year award to the sister in the middle of the picture — and words reminiscent to me of Jesus’ words about his Father:

We are all knowing nothing and no one but our mother. Never again will the world feel so complete. Our time on earth becomes a quest for love. We look for love to feed us, love to teach us, love to help us grow and keep us safe. And we will find it, because love is always closer than we think. Love is in every smile we exchange, every lesson we share, every hand we hold, every gift we give and we receive. Love is in every breath we take. It is the greatest prize of all.