

I love the story of how God created *The Mother*:

While the Good Lord was creating mothers God was into the sixth day of "overtime" when the angel appeared, "You're doing a lot of fiddling around on this one." And the Lord said, "Have you read the specs? She has to be completely washable, but not plastic. Have 180 movable parts, all replaceable. Run on black coffee and leftovers. Have a lap that disappears when she stands up. Have a kiss that can cure anything from a broken leg to a disappointed love affair. And have six pairs of hands." The angel shook her head slowly and said, "Six pairs of hands? That's impossible." "It's not the hands that are causing me problems," said the Lord. "It's the three pairs of eyes that mothers have to have." "That's on the standard model?" asked the angel.

The Lord nodded. "One pair that see through closed doors when she asks, "What are you kids doing in there? when she already knows. Another here in the back of her head that sees what she shouldn't, but what she has to know, and of course the ones here in front that can look at a child when he goofs up and reflects, 'I understand and I love you' without so much as uttering a word."

"Lord," said the angel, "come to bed. Tomorrow..." "I can't," said the Lord, "I'm so close to creating something so close to myself. Already I have one who heals herself when she is sick...can feed a family of six on one pound of hamburger... and can get a nine-year-old to stand under a shower."

The angel circled the model of The Mother very slowly. "It's too soft," she sighed. "But tough," said the Lord excitedly. "You cannot imagine what this Mother can do or endure."

"Can it think?" "Not only think, but it can reason and compromise," said the Creator. Finally, the angel bent over and ran her fingers across the cheek. "There's a leak," she pronounced. "I told you you were trying to put too much into this model. You can't ignore the stress factor."

The Lord moved in for a closer look and gently lifted the drop of moisture to his finger where it glistened and sparkled in the light. It's not a leak," God said. "It's a tear."

"A tear?" asked the angel. "What's it for?" "It's for joy, sadness, disappointment, compassion, pain, loneliness, pride, and love."

"You are a genius," said the angel...¹

In our Gospel lesson, I think Jesus describes maternal love perfectly. It's about laying down your life for another. Jesus told his disciples, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends... This is my commandment to you; that you love one another as I have loved you." Maternal love may even be the highest form of God's love. It's been said that *mothers are those who know you but love you anyway!*

¹ Erma Bombeck, *Motherhood: The Second Oldest Profession*, pp. 176-177.

Whether you are a mother or father, a sister or brother, a wife or husband, or living alone, I invite you to consider the patterns or routines or habits that guide your relationships. If you're living as a single person, consider the patterns which guide your close relationships. How and what do you communicate with your family and friends? What are you communicating on a daily basis? How do you talk to your children? Your parents? How do you wake up and greet one another each new day? Do you take each family member and their needs into account? Who has the power in the family? Who handles the money? Whose opinion matters? Are there smiles and laughter, or is there more arguing and complaining? Is there a lot of silence? How do you show your frustration, your anger, your support, your love, your encouragement to one another? If other family members had to summarize your main personal quality, what would it be?

For some, it may require years of reflection and analysis, sometimes with a counselor or therapist to "unpack" how and why we act the way we do. Sometimes it is necessary to confront those who have hurt us, and to work through a long process of healing. Sometimes acknowledgment of painful truth can lead to reconciliation, but now always. Looking back to the past can help make positive changes in the way we relate in the present.

Parents play a significant part in forming patterns of relating in any household. We all bring into our relationships those behavioral and family systems we inherited while growing up. Some were positive and healthy for caring and open relationships. Other systems were not so helpful.

The question is, how are your *family systems* working out for you? It's good to occasionally evaluate the difference between what *is* and what *should be*. It was Goethe who once quipped, "Love is an ideal thing and marriage a real thing, and a confusion of the two never goes unpunished!"

Jesus came to show us what real love involves and commanded us to show the same love for one another. The bottom line is our lives will reflect the God we worship. Hopefully as Christians, our love will reflect the self-giving and inclusive love of the God revealed in Jesus.

Did you see the story about Sara Cunningham in *The New York Times* this week? Sara is the mother of Parker. Parker came out to Sara as a gay man when he was 21 years old. Because of the falsehoods she was taught at her church, she initially rejected her son. She shamed her son with the best intentions but shamed him nonetheless and alienated him as he had to pretend to be someone else in his own home.

But she knew something wasn't right about how she was treating him. Call it a mother's intuition... She found faith-based resources to better understand the history of homosexuality. "I met other moms of gay children and met members of the gay community. I thought my son was going to burn in hell. So, I needed to reconcile my faith of a loving God with the suggestion that this was an unforgivable sin. The truth is, there is no scripture that condemns homosexuality."

Sara had a conversion experience and decided to do something about it. She made a homemade button that said, "Free Mom Hugs" and at the *Oklahoma City Pride Festival*, she stood by the march and offered hugs.

“‘The very first hug went to a beautiful girl,’ she recalled. ‘We embraced, and she whispered in my ear, “It’s been four years since I got a hug from my mom because I’m a lesbian.” I must have given hundreds of hugs that day, with each one came a similar story.’”

Thankfully, Sara and Parker now have a relationship. She says to other parents out there, “It’s OK to search this matter out. The only other choice is to remain in fear and ignorance. Your child is entrusting you with the most tender and intimate part of his/her/their lives. If you don’t come to the point where you can celebrate with your child, you’re going to suffer with them.”²

The bottom line for Christians is captured in Sara’s story. We are all called to move toward fundamental respect for all people, because all people carry the *imago dei*. All people are bearers of the image of God. And love is the way to transform all of our relationships for good.

Jesus said, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." The Good News is that God’s universal love is revealed in Jesus. And Jesus commands us to go and do likewise. Love one another. That is the family system, if you will, for all Christians; for all mothers, fathers, children and grandchildren; sisters and brothers, all siblings, all aunts and uncles. The model is Jesus self-giving love.

Easier said than done, right? One sage put it this way: "Lord, I don't have any trouble loving you; it's the people down here I'm having a hard time with." G.K. Chesterton once quipped, “The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because they are generally the same people.”³

Emily Askew notes: “Love in this passage is not a psychological state, nor is it anywhere described as an internal quality (or feeling). Love is an action, a really difficult action...”⁴ It is a volitional act, a choice. God chose to love us, and we are called to choose to love our neighbors, even our enemies. I would suggest that Jesus calls us to lay down our lives for anyone, really. God’s love is not selective, it is universal.

Which leads us to the other two amazing assertions Jesus makes in our text. He says that he will make our *joy complete*, and that he calls us *friends*. Those are topics worth more sermons, but I can’t think of any greater joy than seeing our own children, even the children of our community growing up and reflecting the goodness, truth, beauty and love that we have tried to pass on to them. As they grow and mature, our relationships are transformed over the years from parental to friendship. We’re still parents, but as mutual respect, equality of power and common affection are shared, we become more as friends.

One final note. You’ve probably read before that the original *Mother’s Day*, organized by Julia Ward Howe in 1872, was really *a rally for peace*. She wanted to mobilize women against the policies that lead to war: “Why don’t mothers interfere in

² Jenny Block, “This Mother Strives to Change the World, One Hug at a Time” (*New York Times*, May 4, 2021), referenced online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/05/style/free-mom-hugs-lgbtq-nonprofit.html?referringSource=articleShare>

³ G.K. Chesterton, *Illustrated London News*, July 16, 1910

⁴ Emily Askew, *Feasting on the Gospels: A Feasting on the Word Commentary, John Volume 2 Chapters 10–21* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 176.

these matters to prevent the waste of human life which they alone bear and know the cost?" she lamented...

What are creative ways we all are called to lay down our lives for others? Is it getting involved in smarter gun laws? Is it working for better understanding and respect for our LGBTQ siblings? Is it working for greater freedoms and equality for people of color? Is it pursuing ways to protect the rights of immigrants and refugees in our country, particularly those of different faith backgrounds? Maybe it means working to eliminate the pay gap between men and women? How can we pretend to honor mothers today, if we don't work for equal rights of women every day?

Perhaps we all can dig a little deeper to share in the very high calling of maternal love? To realize that any friend of God is called to discover those best maternal instincts that evoke care and compassion, indeed our most patient love and desire to strive for peace, for *shalom*, "the way it's supposed to be." That will make us friends with God!

Finally, remember that in the household of God, we are all called to love not just in words, but in actions, even if it means laying down our lives for others. That's what good moms do. That's what good friends of God do. And I suspect that this maternal self-giving love is the divine source of all the best joy in the world.

In the name of the one Triune God, Mother, Friend, and Encourager. Amen.