

**“Endlessly Drawn”****Rev. Maeve Hammond****Exodus 1:22, 2:2-3, 5-6, 10 & Acts 1:6-11****12 May 2024**

I'd like us to start this portion of worship by thinking about what the words “mother” and “mom” mean to us. Perhaps you picture a new mom rocking a sleeping baby or you feel your own mother's hug and the distinct smell of her shampoo and perfume and laundry detergent. While some of us imagine warmth and embrace, Mother's Day for others of us may feel more complicated. The words estranged, grieving, isolated, disappointed, and fractured may be coming up for you. Or, maybe you can feel both the closeness and the farness that you share with the mothers and mother-like figures in your life. I would imagine that's actually how it is for most of us—complicated and lovely, wistful and grounded.

Now, let's return to the words of St. Julian of Norwich that we heard at the beginning of our worship service. In her medieval mystical masterpiece, *Revelations of Divine Love*, St. Julian repeatedly characterizes Jesus's relationship with us and the core of his being as motherly. She writes, “Thus in Jesus, our true Mother, has our life been grounded....We see that Jesus is the true Mother of our nature, for he made us. He is our Mother, too, by grace, because he took our created nature upon himself.... [Indeed,] our Savior is our true Mother in whom we are endlessly born.” St. Julian's Jesus is earthy: he is the soil we came from, the dirt on our hands after digging in the garden, the ashes we put on our foreheads at the beginning of Lent, and the particles of our physical body after death returning to the ground. St. Julian asserts that Jesus made us and, also, we made him. Jesus “took our created nature upon himself.” Jesus the Messiah became the Word incarnate, became one of us, became a divine being in human flesh, to commune with us, drink with us, grow with us, and care for us. Teacher, guide, friend, confidant, caretaker, strong-willed embodiment of right and wrong and the greyness in between—yeah, Jesus sounds like a mom to me. But, here's what I think St. Julian is getting at in *Revelations*: a mother cannot be a mother without establishing an attachment or relationship

with someone else. In that sense, someone becomes a mother to another in many roles—a biological mother, a step-mother, a godmother, a grandmother, a pseudo mother, an adopted mother, a guardian mother, even a drag mother—but the relationship they have with the individual they shepherd and care for and teach *makes* them a mother. Jesus wouldn't be the Jesus we know him to be without us. He wouldn't be Savior, Messiah, God's only begotten son if he hadn't come to earth to mother us. Jesus has made us and we have made him in the way that motherhood makes a parent and a child.

The triune God has always been one who creates, shapes, molds, and divines, and we have always been a people that wants to understand God's work. Do you remember the moment when you realized your parents were *people*, not just divinely-appeared, almost celestial beings who materialized in this world just to take care of you? Do you remember looking at photos of your parents in their youth and realizing, *wow, they actually had a life before me?* We are fascinated with our parents' and families' histories and mysteries, from genealogy quests to flipping through family albums of people you don't even recognize to DNA ancestry tests to asking grandma what the world was like when she was your age. It can take a whole lifetime for us to understand just a fraction of who our parents are. It's no wonder we humans are also endlessly drawn to understanding, and trying to understand, and failing to understand, just a fraction of who our ultimate parent is—the triune God. Maybe, by uncovering them, we can dig down, blow off the dust, and find an explanation for why we are who we are.

So, spiritually (for fear I'm getting into psychoanalytic territory), what is it about us humans that draws us to the larger mystery of the beings who fashioned us? The mystery of our parents, the mystery of our world, the mystery of the divine—scholars, theologians, counselors, sages, writers, artists have spent their lives for, literally, thousands of years on these mysteries. We can first start by going to Scripture. Our Scripture readings today came from the first and second chapters of Exodus and the first chapter of Acts. Both readings place us into settings of ancestry and mystery.

In Exodus, Moses has just been born in Egypt under Pharaoh's law to kill any newborn, Hebrew boys. Moses's mother, Jochebed, hides Moses for three months. When she can no longer afford to hide him, she places him by the riverbank of the Pharaoh's home. Pharaoh's daughter finds Moses and takes pity on him, exclaiming, "This must be one of the Hebrews' children!" Moses's biological sister, Miriam, pretends to an attendant to the Pharaoh's daughter. She offers to take him until he is weaned, presumably taking Moses back home for the first six months or the first year of his life. After which, she returns him to his adopted mother, Pharaoh's daughter. Pharaoh's daughter is drawn to Moses. Imagine her lifting him up in her arms, looking into his newborn eyes, and feeling the instant love and connection between the two of them. Knowing that he is Hebrew-born, she seeks to protect him against all odds—against, even her father's, the Pharaoh's, orders.

Jochebed and Miriam, too, are drawn to protecting Moses and making sure that he stays alive, again, at any cost. They risk their own lives by defying Pharaoh and fooling—honestly, so blatantly—his daughter. They, also, sacrifice their own relationships as family to him by handing him over into Pharaoh's home. What will become of Moses?, they must have wondered. Will he be hateful and prejudiced like Pharaoh? Will he also grow to hate the Hebrews? Will he be a violent man? But, they lean into the divine mystery etched into baby Moses's being, drawn to the feeling of protection above possible risk. Ancestrally, the women in Moses's lives set a course for who he will become as a man: courageous, though reluctantly so; touched and led by God; defiant against injustice and prejudice; drawn to protecting his people above his own fears.

Now, let's turn to the Acts passage and see if it has anything in common with Exodus. Jesus has been resurrected, and he is having his last gathering with his Apostles. They ask him if he will restore sovereignty to God's people. By this, I think the Apostles are acting for religious and cultural protection from the same ruling powers that killed Jesus under the Roman empire. We then read a description as dazzling and mystical as the mountain-top transfiguration, where another cloud from the heavens declare Jesus divine. The same cloud comes to Jesus and the

apostles and draws Jesus up and away. Like Moses's burning bush, God comes to human flesh through the natural elements, declares them divine, and ushers them to the next step of their journey. Jesus is drawn to the mystical love of God, sealing his final transformation and transition from a human body to a place with God. Also, like Moses, Jesus is literally drawn upward into the embrace of God, his parent. You'll recall the Pharaoh's daughter drew Moses up from his basket in the reeds and embraced him, an action that set the course of the rest of his life and ministry in God. If the figures in Exodus were drawn to protection, Jesus and the cloud of God are drawn to transformation in Acts.

A mother may be endlessly drawn to both of these themes—protection and transformation: the protection of the health and wellness of her child and the transformation of them from newborn to toddler to child to young adult and all of the life steps beyond. We see time and time again how divinity endlessly draws God's people to a value, a relationship, a purpose in the spirit and the flesh. As we continue our worship and leave this space today to go about our everyday lives, ask yourself: where is the triune God drawing you? Where can you, too, embrace the mystery and allow Mother God to renew and redraw your childlike self in wonder, imagination, and hope. Where can you embrace your motherly qualities, beyond gender and age? How can you challenge yourself to call divinity a feminine "she," with all of the power and logic we attribute to a masculine "he?" Or, how can you look beyond the gender binary and see motherhood as a fluid, non-gendered representation of guidance, love, generosity, and strength? Friends, may our Parent God, Mother Jesus, and Sister Spirit guide us today, tomorrow, and forevermore, dwelling richly in us and drawing us where we need to go. Amen.