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## Mothering: The Nurturing Nature of God

I had a couple of friends and their young children over for lunch on Wednesday. These are two women who are very good mothers. As I watch them with their little ones I can see them reflecting the image of God. They watch over their children with a desire to protect them, they make sure they have good, nourishing food, they patiently correct them when they are heading in the wrong direction. They want to protect them from harm; harm that they might encounter in the world and harm that they might do to themselves through innocence, ignorance, or selfishness.

I know these women want to be the best mother's they can possibly be, they want to help their kids explore the world in freedom and in safety. They let their kids be themselves, even when others might have different expectations. They give them opportunities to learn and discover their own gifts. They let them play.

Some of us have had mothers like this, mothers that we want to celebrate and honour today. Some of us have had absent mothers, mothers who died too young or who were physically absent or emotionally distant. Some of us have had mothers that didn't know how to mother – who abandoned us, abused us, or expected us to take care of them.

Today as I talk about qualities of mothers I know that not all of us have had the mothers that we wished for, and that even those of us who have loving and good mothers don't have perfect mothers.

As we think today about mothering it is important to remember that God is not made in the image of our mothers but that the best qualities and ways of being that mothers have are like God, although He is all these things perfectly.

### **Genesis 1:27 says,**

So God created human beings in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

Sometimes I think because we are taught to call God Father, we forget that he is not male. God made humans in his image to be male and female, therefore he is as feminine as he is masculine. He is as much like a mother as he is like a father.

The Christian mystic, Julian of Norwich, writes in her Revelations of Divine Love, "God is our mother as truly as he is our father; and he showed this in everything, and especially in the sweet words where he says, 'It is I', that is to say, 'It is I: the power and goodness of fatherhood. It is I: the wisdom of motherhood. It is I: the light and the grace which is all blessed love.'"

This week I asked some of you to share what mothering qualities you most appreciated in your own mother, what qualities you admire most in mother's that you know and if you are a mother what qualities you most want to have. This morning I am going to talk about some of these and we'll also see how Mrs. Jumbo from the movie Dumbo lives out some of these qualities.

**One thing that people shared about their experience of their mother's was the sense of safety and security that they're Mom's provided.**

There are different elements to this sense of security that mother's provide. Mother's are protective of their children – they look out for them and try to keep them from danger. They provide the boundaries that keep kids safe physically, and emotionally.

Dumbo clip 1 – 18:05 – 19:21

Dumbo's Mom was definitely protective of him – she risked everything to keep him safe from the meanness of others.

The other day when my little friends were playing in my house their mother's made sure they were all safe. When one was kicking balloons his Mom made sure he wasn't doing so in his baby sister's face. When another was pulling on the collar of her new friend, her Mom made sure she wasn't hurting him. These children may not realize it yet but their Mom's intrude on their fun once in a while because they have their kid's safety in mind.

As well as the physical sense of protecting and keeping safe there is the emotional sense of security that mother's provide. One person said that what they most appreciated about their mother was, "Just an overall sense that

things were okay when mom was around. When she was away at work or out, home felt a little off [without] her mothering presence.”

I strongly resonate with that feeling; I don't have a lot of distinct memories as a young child but when I think of that time I have a feeling of the sense of security that my mom's presence provided. I remember feeling safe and having freedom to have fun.

Although our parents and mother's particularly do so as we are growing up, God is the one who ultimately provides us with security in our life. Not the security of a good income, no trouble or hardship and a perfect life but the unchanging, unconditional safety of his presence with us.

### **Psalm 46:1-3**

**1** God is our refuge and strength,  
an ever-present help in trouble.

**2** Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way  
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,

**3** though its waters roar and foam  
and the mountains quake with their surging.

God does not promise us that we will never suffer, in fact we can count on suffering, but He promises to be our refuge and strength in trouble – an ever present help. For this reason we don't need to be afraid of the uncertainty, of the quaking, roaring and foaming that may surround us.

Simon Tugwell, one of my favourite authors, says of this abiding presence of God, “And so we shall find, mysteriously, that this unobtrusive and unimpressive gift in which God simply gives himself, is the seed of that final revelation of glory when every tear will be wiped away and all pain and sickness and misery banished....When our Lord tells us to seek first the kingdom of God and then everything else will be added, he does not mean – as he has unfortunately sometimes been taken to mean – that piety is the way to prosperity (“prayer pays”) but that when God is all in all, then automatically “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner things shall be well.”

When we take refuge in God, when we find our safety in Him, when we let God be all in all that is when we can say with confidence “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner things shall be well.”

### **The second quality that people either appreciated about their Mom or really wanted to have as a Mom was the capacity to be loving and kind, compassionate and caring.**

Barb said, “The quality I appreciate most in my mother is her loving kindness.”

A desire to have these qualities was also expressed by Karyn, who said, “The quality I want to have most as a mother is grace. I ask God daily to help me be a better mom. I pray that I could be a gracious and godly woman and mother. Grace to me means that I will be loving, kind, creative and compassionate - even when the monotony of motherhood and sleepless nights are weighing heavy and all I can think about is my next cup of coffee and when is my husband getting home!!!”

Trish said “the quality I most appreciate about my mom is she always listens and encourages me” And another friend said to me this week, “My Mom is who I tell stuff to”, and we weren't even talking about Mother's Day.

Good mothers have the ability to care about us, to extend to us love, encouragement and compassion.

Kindness is a word that is not really used a lot these days, so it is interesting to me that it came up several times as an important quality of mothering. The word kind is defined as “of a sympathetic nature: disposed to be helpful and solicitous: of a forbearing nature: gentle”.

In this scene from Dumbo, he comes to visit his Mother who is in solitary confinement for her defense of Dumbo against those who were hurting him.

Dumbo clip 2: 39:00 –41:16

Dumbo's Mom was sympathetic to his distress even in the midst of her own. She put his needs first and comforted him when she could.

Compassion is defined as “sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it”. God often says that He will have or does have compassion on us. In Hebrew the word compassion comes from the same root as the word womb. Julian of Norwich says, “And our Saviour is our true mother in whom we are eternally born and by whom we shall always be enclosed.” When we think of God's compassion, we might think of ourselves as being 'enclosed' or held in His womb.

In the book of Isaiah God often speaks of his love for us in strong maternal language.

**Is. 66:13 says,**

As a mother comforts her child,  
so will I comfort you;  
and you will be comforted over Jerusalem."

**And Is. 49:15**

"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast  
and have no compassion on the child she has borne?  
Though she may forget,  
I will not forget you!

Even the best of Mother's cannot love us with a love that compares to God's. His loving kindness, his compassion and capacity to care for us is far beyond what any of us can imagine. And when we have had a mother who has not treated us kindly, we can turn to God for what we have missed.

**The third quality most often mentioned was the ability of Mom's to give us opportunity to explore the world and become all we are meant to be.**

When I watch Mom's with their children one of the things I love to see is when they encourage their kids to explore the world around them and to develop their own gifts.

I remember one time when my nephew Jackson was about three and he was helping his Mom to grate cheese. I asked Lisa, "Aren't you afraid that he will scrape his fingers?" She responded that he wanted to help her and that he was pretty good at using the grater. I realized what a gift to him her confidence in his capacity to help was. At some point he may have scraped his fingers, but if so he would have learned to be more careful, whereas if he hadn't been allowed to help when he wanted to, he would not have gained anything and may have lost some of his innate desire to help and the opportunity to build his skill and confidence. I'm not recommending that you let your kids do everything they want to, but I think it is important not be too protective and fearful as kids grow up. I think if I had been a mother this would have been one of the biggest challenges for me.

Mom's can give their children help in becoming who they are meant to be. Probably more than anyone else in their life they can help them discover

their unique gifts and develop their competencies in order to become mature. They can help their children gain confidence and freedom as they grow up and find their own way in life.

Anthea shared, "My mum didn't seem to sweat the small stuff. I also really appreciate that my mum could let us go, and my mum has had to do some pretty big letting go. 4 out of 5 kids live out of the country and she has never laid a guilt trip on us but rather encouraged us to do what we need to do. Being a mum myself I see that as pretty huge.

Probably I would most like to have those same qualities. I would like to give my kids freedom to be who they are, and to mess up a little on that journey to finding themselves."

God is like that too - He helps us find the way that is best for us, that leads us to life.

**Jeremiah 29:11 says,**

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

The plans that God has for all of us are that we would worship Him in truth and integrity; that we would grow in comprehending His love for us.

Jesus came that we might have life, and have it to the full. I believe this means finding and using our unique gifts, it means becoming all that we are intended to be; it means living up to our potential in every area of our life. The maternal heart of God wants the best for us and from us.

God is our comforter and protector, he never forgets us and he always has our best interests at heart. He is loving-kindness and tenderness, compassion and mercy. His love endures forever. He desires life for us and a future filled with hope.

**Psalms 27:10 reminds us that,**

Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.

Today may we honour and celebrate the Mom's that are part of our life - whether it is our own Mom, a spouse, a sister or friend. If you are a Mom, may you be honoured by those around you. May we also recognize that what we

may have lacked in our own mother or what we may lack as a mother, God is able to give. God is waiting to Mother us.

Sinead O'Connor Song (3 minutes, 20 seconds)

Benediction:

May God, who is compassion, tenderness and love, hold us safe in his embrace today and always.