

**OPENING:**

What do Oliver Twist, Rapunzel, Snow White, Mowgli, Luke Skywalker, Harry Potter, Tom Sawyer, Batman, Spiderman, and Superman all have in common?

They are all orphans.

They all have the misfortune of growing up in this world without parents.

Guess who else are orphans?

The disciples in our Gospel, and so by extension, us.

John's Gospel has Jesus' reassuring words that he will not leave us orphans precisely *because* the disciples and John's community felt like they were. The feeling of abandonment from Jesus' death left a gaping hole among the disciples.

The Resurrection promised to fill it, but still there was this sense of being unmoored, of being lost in this world.

To make things worse, the Temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed and the Beloved Disciple, the author of John's Gospel, had died.

The Second Coming didn't seem to be... coming, and they all felt like orphans, this fear of having been deserted.

I do not know what being a literal orphan is like.

However, undoubtedly all of us have at least *felt* like an orphan, if not from a biological standpoint, then from a psychological or spiritual standpoint.

Against all that, Jesus, who was himself a kind of orphan, promises that he will be there, be here, be with us, even as he is gone.

Let's look at that this morning, this idea of the Upper Room as orphanage, as we also celebrate Mother's Day in our own culture and as we grapple with our identity as God's children, the inheritors of Christ's promise, in a harsh and broken world.

## **PARABLE:**

To start, I will tell a parable, not one of Jesus', this is from writer G.K. Chesterton, and it goes like this:

*A man who was entirely careless of spiritual affairs died and went to hell. And he was much missed on earth by his old friends.*

*His business agent went down to the gates of hell to see if there was any chance of bringing him back.*

*But though he pleaded for the gates to be opened, the iron bars never yielded.*

*His priest also went and argued (to the devil, saying): 'He was not really a bad fellow; given time he would have matured. Let him out, please!'*

*The gate remained stubbornly shut against all their voices.*

*Finally, (the man's) mother came;*

*she did not beg for his release.*

*Quietly, and with a strange catch in her voice, she said to Satan:*

*'Let me in.'*

*Immediately the great doors swung open upon their hinges.*

*(Why? Chesterton writes:)*

*For love goes down through the gates of hell  
and there redeems the dead.<sup>1</sup>*

God's love is "like that." Jesus' presence is like that. The Kingdom of God is like that. It's like a mother's love.

This parable might be helpful if it resonates with you in how maternal love can model God's love. It might not be helpful if that does not resonate, if you have not found maternal love in your life to be as giving and as unconditional as God's.

## **ORPHANS**

If that is the case, you might feel orphaned on this day, kind of like how people who have had difficult relationships with their fathers have felt orphaned with all the masculine language about God throughout Scripture, in our understanding of the Trinity, and on Jesus' lips.

What do we do?

Well you are stuck with your earthly parents... but you can try different language.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Rolheiser, Ronald. 2014. *The Holy Longing: the Search for a Christian Spirituality*. Princeton, NJ: Image, 89-90.

In some circles, it's become fashionable, in response to all the dominant male language, to restate our Creed by using the feminine pronoun for the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, one professes:

“With the Father and the Son, *she* is worshipped and glorified. *She* has spoken through the prophets.” This is explained by the gender of the pronoun for “Spirit” being feminine in Hebrew.<sup>2</sup>

That rearguard action to preserve some of the Trinity as not male has helped some to feel more connected with God.

You might also hear the entirely non-gendered “Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer” formula for the Trinity as a way of getting out of the gender and pronouns game all together.

I think that we end up orphaning ourselves, to a degree, in those efforts, forgetting, as we try to get our language right about God, that God Godself is always relentlessly, even clumsily, reaching out to us, through all sort of strategies and methods, through parables, through human language, and indeed through the love of parents (biological and otherwise.)

## **HOLY SPIRIT**

One such example of that reaching out—another means, another method, another description of how God works—occurs in our passage.

It's unique to John's Gospel with Jesus here talking about something called the ADVOCATE, the word is “Paraclete” in Greek which means councilor, advocate, mentor, intercessor, defense lawyer.

It means someone who will be there for you, when Jesus is gone. Someone who will care for you, advise you, abide with you, console you, cajole, pray for you, exhort, encourage, defend, mediate for you. Someone one who will stick up for you, be there for you, someone who will love you unconditionally.

What does that sound like?

Happy Mother's Day!

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<sup>2</sup> It's masculine in Latin and neuter in Greek if you are keeping score.

And while we are on it, does not that description of the “Paraclete”—that dogged determination to advocate at any cost—sound an awful lot like a nosy Church lady who is all up in your business!

Maybe the Holy Spirit is feminine, or at least the Paraclete is!

## **LOVE:**

In the end, God’s attempts ultimately don’t seem to be so much concerned with gender, as they are concerned instead with the relentless, abiding closeness and the ubiquity of the love that God provides through the Holy Spirit.

On that front, throughout Scripture, the Holy Spirit appears as wind, as flame, as dove, as pillars of cloud, as fire, even as ‘a still small voice.’

If not this, God will try that, appearing in every which way to stay connected and to not leave us as orphans. Whatever it takes.

Think of God as “Mrs. Doubtfire” if you remember that movie.

God will *even* condescend to be an advocate, a counselor, a LAWYER, (for crying out loud!) if it means getting close to us and being with us.

I think that the Parable that I shared earlier said it best: you send in whoever you can, and then you eventually send in mom, or whoever the person is whose ‘love forcefield’ is so compelling that the harrowing of hell does not stand a chance.

## **CONCLUSION**

With all that having been said, Jesus (famously) is not very sentimental on the point of mothers.

He could be a touch moody and abrupt with his own mother. Like a teenager going through a phase,

Only in John’s Gospel, this one, do they share that moment on the cross.

Jesus says to his Mother: “Woman, here is your Son.”

Jesus says to the Beloved Disciple, the presumed author of the Gospel:

“Here is your mother.”

He might have added “Do not leave her orphaned, and I will do the same for you.”<sup>3</sup>

## **AMEN**

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<sup>3</sup> John 19.25-27