

# Nurturing the World

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Mother's Day honors mothering...the special commitment to nurturing a child which a woman makes and carries out, and since all of us have at least one mother, and not only a genetic mother but a mothering person, man or woman... who nurtured us at least enough that we survived childhood and are here to tell the tale, Mother's Day is seen in this culture as a universal holiday, and it's statistics are kept like Christmas...most meals out, most phone calls, most flowers.

Mothering, both the biological act of bearing a child and the years-long life commitment to raising a child, is hugely important. We human beings are so constructed that without at least a good dose that kind of care we shrivel up and die; if not physically, then emotionally. When it comes to human beings, Mother Nature depends on mothering in a big way. The rewards of being a good enough mother and the benefits of having had good enough mothering can't be overestimated.

For many, many people, it is a lovely, love-filled day in which we connect to our gratitude for our mother and our children.

But it's not necessarily a simple day, even for those whose lives have been filled with motherly love. We're not all effusively grateful for our mothers, and many of us who are, are also grieving their deaths. Our great need for a nearly infinite amount of nurturing makes our feelings about our mother, complex and our knowledge about our mothering ambivalent. Nor is mothering always all that it is cracked up to be in the Hallmark section. The experience of loss is always a

part of mothering: even when all goes well, children grow up, abandon their childhood ways and go off to make new friends and have new adventures. More than a few of you teared up over that puppet show. I know...

And sometimes mothering is hard, thankless, painful; and some mothers are also grieving their children's death, their children's absence, their children's choices.

What's a realistic minister to do about all these high emotions? Because you might not of noticed this, but unlike, say, Christmas, Mother's Day falls on a Sunday every single year.

You'll be interested to know that more people tell me that they avoid coming to church on Mother's Day than on any other Sunday of the year except when we do a Blessing of the Pets. And with Mother's day, there isn't even the excuse of allergies. I always promise them that our "motherhood" is a big tent that includes everyone who nurtures others or the world, but for some folks, I can tell, that's not enough.

Mother's Day is way too often sentimental. "Sentimental" does not honor real love, because sentimental is only about the pretty parts, the easy stuff, and the authorized parties. Real love is much bigger, much deeper, much more complicated, and much harder than that.

In this church, we stand on the side of Real Love. Love that means letting go. Love that means real sacrifice. Love that means facing change. Love that gives

life and then nurtures it, and not just in our families or tribes or cozy communities, but in our complex societies, our divided nation, our world full of people who are and always will be different from us and somewhat mysterious to us.

What we celebrate on Mother's day is no so much smiling children at the knee of a smiling mother....though, of course, that's a beautiful picture. It's just not big enough or real enough. The Love of Mother's day is the love of calming a child's tantrum, of doing your mom's finances, seeing your teen off to a college you wish he hadn't chosen, planning a memorial service. The love of Mother's Day is the love of correcting spelling tests, nursing your sick spouse, counseling a troubled teenager. And since the love we learned from our mothers or whomever nurtured us is expended not just on children or even people, but on the world, real love is taking your dying pet to the vet one last time, guiding a church board or a neighborhood association or a professional group in the ways of democracy and justice, Changing your ideas about categories that seem fundamental to you like gender and race because love does not oppress.

In the end, not everything is lost because we human beings have a nurturing bone in our bodies, almost every single one of us. That nurturing bone is never strong in some and broken in a few, but most of us can find ours and use it, and make meaning in our lives from it.

It is not all we do, most of us. We also create, produce, clean up, imagine, relax, dream, and sometimes all those things are in some conflict with the time and energy of nurturing. It's not easy and not always pleasant to have others dependence in the palm of your hands, or on your heart.

Not even half of us are capable of biological motherhood, and even then for less than half of our lives, but we are all called to nurture the world, every day of our lives. Is your motherhood expended on your bees, your garden, the neighborhood park which you quietly patrol for trash and dog poop? Happy Mothers Day, and thank you from all of us!

Is your motherhood expended on letters to the editor, calls to congress, rallies with clever signs, knocking on doors for the candidates who will make this a better society? Happy Mothers Day to you, too!

And if, like me, a lot of your mothering energy is being spent on your parents or your partner, if you are paying bills for someone who can't or visiting in Rehab or Assisted Living, well, Happy Mothers Day to you, too.

You won't be surprised to hear that the nurturing that's on my mind this morning is the nurturing of this congregation: it's people, one by one; through lifes joys and tragedies, elations and depressions, and changes...always changes. This care, like all care, was both a work and a learning: I aimed always to be there when you asked, but I also got a lot out of hearing your stories and watching you adjust and learn. I'm wiser because of you. Now it's time to let go...and since I learned when my son left home that I could get through that...I'll get through it! and move on to a new kind of relationship on the other side.

Sentimental mothers day focuses on all the giving those babies and children and even teens soak up...all the love, all the cleaning, all the anguish. But real love

also gives back...in satisfaction, in pride, yes, but also in lessons learned, compassion gained. We who love are better for our loving.

There's no Hallmark card from the neighbors around the park who enjoy the litter-free grass, and no flowers from the citizens of the city, "Thanks for caring about justice to immigrants," and no candy from kids you buy lemonade from each summer on your way home from work. For those things, we must mother ourselves, we must remind ourselves of the importance of love...the love we learned at the knee of the ones who loved us, but the love which is often very different from traditional mothering.

You may nurture the world with deeds large and small because it feels good; and if it is that way for you, may you know the joy of giving through the days and nights of your life.

You may nurture the world because you believe that in that lies the meaning of your life, and if it is that way for you, may you feel that meaning to your bones.

You may nurture the world because you stand on the side of love as a moral commitment; may your nurturing open your heart to compassion and teach you all you are ready to learn.

You may nurture the world as a theological commitment; for if God is love then the more love created and expressed in our troubled world, the more God grows and if She is sitting beside her window looking down on her children, praying that we find our way home, well then... you be Her guiding hands, her soft words, Her big heart.

But whoever you are, mother, daughter, son, helper, hoper, doer of good deeds;  
honorary aunt, beloved teacher, wise neighbor, activist for a better world: if you  
nurture the world, Happy Mothers Day.