



Trinity Church Wall Street 11:15am Holy Eucharist – Trinity Sunday
The Rev. Elizabeth Blunt Sermon Transcript

“Motherly Love”

Short:

Preaching on Mother’s Day, Mother Beth reminds us that mothering others is a holy vocation into which we’re all invited.

Long:

Preaching on Mother’s Day, the Rev. Elizabeth Blunt acknowledges that this is not a simple holiday, even in the best of times. She offers that mothering “isn’t just a thing women with children can do” and indeed much of what Jesus does in John’s last supper sequence is “motherly”: the washing of feet, the teaching, the correcting, the comforting, and the preparing of rooms. Mothering is a holy vocation into which we’re all invited as children of God. The scriptures are Acts 10:44–48; Psalm 98; 1 John 5:1–6; and John 15:9–17.

Sermon Transcript:

May I speak to you in the name of the Father, and the Son and, the Holy Spirit. Please be seated.

Good morning, everybody. Seven years ago, this month, as it happens, I had my priestly ordination. I was remembering this week that after the service, I was greeting people out in the narthex. There was a woman, of some years, who shook my hand and said all of the nice things. She said, "Congratulations. We're so proud of you. What a wonderful ministry you're going to have." But then, she leaned in and finished with, "I'm never going to call you mother". I said, the only thing I could, I said, "You will call me mother, Ma'am, or I'll have you ejected from the premises. No, I didn't say that. What I said was, "Okay. Tell me. Tell me about that". As I recall, she really couldn't. It wasn't personal, it wasn't particularly rational, I don't think, but I bet, you get it because I get it. There's really no such thing as a mother. There's only your mother. That relationship feels so defining. It's so personal and intimate and at the same time so freighted with all of society's expectations.

Our mothers are literally where we come from. They're our first dwelling places. It's hard to use the word mother in a neutral way. Mother's Day isn't always a simple holiday. For some of you today, you will have brunch and flowers and happy Zoom calls or telephone calls, good memories and gratitude, and to all of you, I say, happy Mother's Day, I'm wish you all the joy. Others of us will be remembering a mother we've lost or children we've lost. Some will be revisiting unhealed hearts or grieving a miracle that never happened. If any of that is the case for you, you're not alone and you're not invisible. I suspect that most of us feel more than just one way on Mother's Day. Mothering, of course, isn't something that only women with children do. It's a holy vocation into which we're all invited. We see God mothering time and again in our scriptures, Jesus too, in fact, we might call most of what Jesus does in John's Last Supper sequence where we are today motherly. The washing of feet, the teaching of lessons and prayers, the corrections and the comfort, the preparing of rooms. My own mum, whom I adore, I think most of you know that, has lots of gifts.

She is an artist, first and foremost, who's applied her aesthetic genius to pretty much everything she's done in her life, including the creation of home. She studied the way light filtered in through curtains and glass. She played with colors and textures and art and reflections. Everything was comfortable and beautiful in our house, even if it wasn't fancy. It was a place where people felt sheltered and safe. I've heard some of you talk about your homes too, about doors that were always open, and mums who'd feed anyone literally who showed up at the table. Abide, of course, comes from the same root as abode, and it means to stay, to remain. It's a warm and comfortable word. One of the most important words in the whole Gospel of John, where it shows up no fewer than 40 times. For comparison sake, in the other three gospels combined only about 12 times. When Andrew, Peter's brother, and probably John himself first started trailing after Jesus back in chapter 1, the first words they spoke to him were, Rabbi, where are you staying? Where do you abide? Jesus said to them, "come and see."

Then here, in chapter 15, just before Jesus's arrest, abiding is at the heart of the most authoritative direction Jesus gives in the whole fourth gospel. This imperative to abide in love. I've been trying to think of times when we actually see Jesus at home in the gospels, and you Bible scholars out there getting all ready to cite Luke 9. Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head. know, have visited Nazareth and you've gone down under that convent and seen the ruins that some people claim are Jesus's childhood home. It's strange and super poignant to imagine 10-year-old Jesus occupying that space, running out that doorway, hearing his mum call out after him. In his adult life, we get a brief glimpse of Jesus staying in Peter's house in Capernaum where Peter lived with his mother and probably his wife and children. We see Jesus probably most at home with Mary and Martha and Lazarus in Bethany, that's where he'd stay when he visited Jerusalem. But by and large, we come to know Jesus as an itinerant.

Traveling from the desert of Galilee to Jerusalem, to Sidon and Sumeria, and back again on foot, in boats, going out to meet the people to whom he was sent, always in motion and always to a certain extent exposed. The Book of Acts, which is, of course, our record of the life of the early church, is a little bit more domestic. We get invited into the homes of people like Lydia, the merchant, and Tabitha, the tailor, and Cornelius, the centurion, which is where we find Peter today. He and Cornelius were kind of pushed together by simultaneous messages from God. At the time, Peter was staying at a friend's seaside house in Joppa, almost wonder if that was a little vocation. Cornelius was at home about 40 miles up the Mediterranean coast in Caesarea Maritima, which was the base of Roman operations in the province. Before he crossed the threshold into Cornelius's home, Peter had a decision to make. A decision that really had direct ramifications on almost all of us. Although it did happen, first-century Jewish people would not have been encouraged to visit the homes of Gentiles, to enter fully into the hospitality and care of people with different customs and traditions, to eat whatever was set in front of them.

On this day, Peter had to apply the teachings of Jesus to live in love rather than in the law, and he did. He told all the people gathered the story of Jesus, and he and his companions were astonished to see the Holy Spirit. Technically, the Holy Spirit was supposed to arrive when Peter laid his own hands on new converts, but the Holy Spirit just dashed down right as it had for them at Pentecost. A sign that God was already at home in that place. That God was abiding there. It's maybe ironic that shortly before Jesus delivered the address we heard today, he had already ushered his disciples out of that room they rented for dinner and back onto the road. It's ironic because what he says to them is, "Stay. As the father has loved me," By which he means both because the father has loved me and in the same way, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. Live there. Stay there. Dwell on this scene I just created for you. This comfortable meal in the company of beloved friends. This place where the host serve the guests with

joy. Where love was in words and actions, and memories. Where hope was shored up and where commandments given were also promises made."

Jesus created a home that night that they were meant to carry with them. We know obedience to the commandments, particularly Jesus's new commandment, was critical to this charge he gave them. But there's some ambiguity as to whether keeping His commandments is a way to abide or whether abiding, as a way of life, necessarily leads to keeping the commandments. Intentional ambiguity, I think, because the love we have to offer God comes from God's own gift of love to us. Paradox. God's love is always a home traveling with us. We don't change that, we can't lose it. We just stray in and out of awareness of it, you and I. The task we're given is to try to make that awareness more consistent, to stay in it, to keep that home in sight, and to remember that miraculous and unlikely chosenness that Father Phil talked about last week. People who abide in Christ's love can't help but return it and share it. They can't help but carry it across arbitrary thresholds. Jesus held heaven every step of his human life. His home was always with him, and Jesus abides now in us. That's one beautiful thing we've learned over the course of this year. Jesus isn't living in this locked-up space. He's been with us at home, He's been in the spaces between us. That doesn't, of course, mean that we can't be super excited about meeting him together in this place again. Beloved, let me say, as you begin to leave shelter more and more in the days or weeks or months ahead, to step back out into the world and into some of the old patterns, you will be abiding in Jesus. He'll stay with you. You are always a child at home no matter where you go.

Amen.