

## How Are You Doing?

This question has so many directions to go these days, doesn't it? How are you doing mentally? How is your health? How is your family life? How is your spiritual life? How is your work life? Have you found balance or something similar?

As strange a time as it is, Mother's Day places another gloss on top of it all. Like Easter or Graduation, this is another 'First' for us all in these new days. Usually, I wrestle with how to take a widely accepted secular holiday and make it work in worship, remembering those who are not mothers, either by choice or circumstance. I also try to be sensitive to folks who don't fit into easy gender assignments and for whom Mother's Day might be misconstrued. Finally, there are those who have had really terrible experiences around being a mother or having a mother, so there's that. Honestly, like several of the larger secular holidays, it is one that I'd generally like to avoid... at least in worship.

But things that are difficult aren't to be avoided, are they? If we can't work them out in a congregation, what hope do we have for a larger society? As always, I go to scripture to find help and direction for my questions and puzzlings. And the biggest touchstone I have from scripture is the following verse, John 19:26-27 Common English Bible, *"When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that time on, this disciple took her into his home."*

It is easy in our cultural comfort point to forget that we are a religion founded upon the work of widows and orphans. Not only are we called to care for them, but from the cross onward the motherless and the childless have been placed together to make new families. Jesus was never part of the early church; after his resurrection, he stayed long enough to tell his followers he was leaving but the Holy Spirit would reside instead, making of them a new expression. So as those 'left behind' by Jesus; the childless and motherless, we were invited to make a new family that leaves no one else behind. If there is someone who longs to hold a child, we are their children. If there is someone who needs a parent: guidance, love, affection, wisdom and encouragement; we are that parent. We stop looking around for someone else to come; Jesus has already given us to one another.

So how do we make Mother's Day work in the church context, or better yet... how do we make

a holiday to express our appreciation to women work in the (hopefully) closing days of a Pandemic?

**First**, in the words of The Isley Brothers, “You got to love the one you’re with...” These are not the days to run to our loved ones in other households and shower them with affection. I miss my mom who lives over 1000 miles away and I am far from being alone in this. But because I love her and others like her, I am being careful with my affection. We will open in due time, but our Bishop has asked that we remain closed as a congregation through May for now. This Is Hard. No question about it. But we are still permitted to shower affection, forgiveness, and support upon those sharing a roof with us. And to keep up with one another through letter and phone and text and email and video chatting and sending gifts. No need to stop now, right?

Along these lines, our congregation is invited to a Zoom Meeting Wednesday night at 7:00 pm that I am hosting. An invitation will be sent out via email, but you can also join through the phone. Please email, text or call if you need help connecting or downloading Zoom. I hope we can connect, share affection and news with one another safely and close in some prayer for our communities.

**Second**, let’s be ourselves - honestly and openly. You and I know this isn’t a permission slip to act badly or however we feel. But my experience with my mom and others like mothers to me is that I could come as I am, whether bloody or tearful or happy or excited and tell them what was in my heart. This is not only limited to moms but maybe a healthy parental expression everywhere. I harken back to the garden of Eden where God walked, calling the shy children Eve and Adam to come forward. Had they listened? We might be living in a different world. So yeah, we might not look so great when uncovered from our false selves and standing in the cold light of day. God doesn’t care. God invites us to be received with LOVE, no matter how we’ve seen ourselves up to this point.

**Finally**, it is time to press forward. Our conference leadership has asked all congregations to carefully and prayerfully consider what our congregation’s life will look like from this point on. Here is a link to the questions we are asked to answer:

<https://www.minnesotaumc.org/newsdetail/returning-to-in-person-worship-13651907>

My hope is at the end of our call on Wednesday we will plan another time to share our thoughts on what opening Northwood up again will look like this year. So we can ask in person to all people, mothers and daughters, sons and fathers, beloved hearts all: “How are you doing?” And then have the blessing to hear from their own lips a response.

Peace to you all, and may God’s rich blessing be yours for the week ahead.

Pastor Brian