

1

This weekend as we focus on giving thanks for our mothers, think about all the things our moms have taught us.

- How to get along with others.
- How to cook a meal or clean the house.
- How to balance having a career while caring for family.
- How to listen to those in need.

Many of us may also have learned about God from our mothers, such as

A little boy who said, “Look, there is a bear in our backyard!”

His mother looked outside and said, “That’s not a bear. It’s Joe Smith’s dog. Now go to your room and ask God to forgive you for telling a lie.”

The boy went to his room and later came back downstairs. His mother asked, “Did you ask God to forgive you?”

The little fellow said, “Yes, and God said it was all right. He said the first time he saw Joe Smith’s dog, he thought it was a bear too.”<sup>1</sup>

Even when we move out on our own and live independent lives, the things our mothers have taught us remain with us. When our parents are no longer with us, due to aging and death, those teachings continue to guide us, something I have become aware of this year as

I learn to live without both of my parents. It’s a strange feeling to no longer have either parent alive, to become an orphan.

When we lose those we love, regardless of one’s age, the feelings of loss may pile up within us as we go from one loss to another—the loss of family members, the loss of jobs, the loss of income, the loss of a home, the loss of friends.

We may learn to juggle our feelings, moving on from one loss to another with ease, but eventually those feelings may catch up with us, propelling us into a sadness that can’t be ignored. And then, it’s as though our soul cries out, “Just be sad for a while. It’s ok to feel the loss. Don’t run away anymore.” And in the midst of grieving, a tiny voice speaks in the silence and pain, “I am still here. I am with you. You are not an orphan.” And then, one may recognize the comforting Presence of God’s Spirit, a Voice reminding us that we’re not alone, something Jesus suggested to his disciples before he left them.

In his final days, Jesus offered his disciples comforting words, for in John’s Gospel we hear Jesus remind his disciples to follow his teachings even after he was not with them. That’s not always easy to do, is it?

2

- How often do we get distracted from caring for others?
- How often do we forget to care for ourselves?
- How often do we make mistakes and mess up our lives?

In these times, we may find ourselves feeling alone.

Jesus made a promise to his followers: in the midst of times of loss, “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you,” which can also be translated as “I will not leave you comfortless,” for Jesus would ask God to send someone to comfort them. In the Greek language of the Bible, Jesus promised that God would send the παράκλητος (par·AK·lay·tos), which literally means “one who is called beside.” The word is often translated as Comforter, Counselor, Advocate, Helper, Intercessor—in other words, someone who actively listens and supports you no matter what you’re going through.

Sensing the presence of the Spirit is not always easy, and sometimes the church has argued about the Spirit, contributing to our misunderstanding of this gift promised by Jesus. Early in the church’s history, some argued about the source of the Spirit, with some advocating that the Spirit came from Father, while others suggested the Spirit came from the Father *and* the Son.

*Orphaned No More*  
May 14, 2023

Rev. Dr. Douglas Cripe  
Central Christian Church, Elkhart & First Christian Church, Mishawaka

This debate eventually led to a split in 1054 between the Western and Eastern churches, resulting in a division in the branches of what we call the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church.

We may not find ourselves arguing today about the source of the Comforter that Jesus said he would ask God to send, but we may still feel uneasy, for the Spirit is unpredictable and may not always do what we have in mind.

The popular novel *The Shack* offers a unique story about the presence of the Spirit to Mack, who struggled with the past abuse of his own father and then faced the abduction of his daughter, Missy, while on a camping trip. Mack feels prompted to visit a cabin in the woods in search of his daughter, and there he encountered the Father in the form of an African-American woman, a Middle Eastern carpenter who introduces himself as Jesus, and the Spirit in the form of an Asian woman. Through conversations with these three, Mack expressed his anger about why bad things happen in the world, especially to his daughter. He grieves, but through the dialogue, he begins to heal and accept what has happened.

Contemporary writer Kate Bowler wrote a book called *The Lives We Actually Have*, containing 100 blessings for

*John 14:15-21*

3

imperfect days. She offers a prayer “for this grief-stricken day.”

God, we are heartbroken in the face of  
so much evil, so much grief.  
Comfort us in our sorrow.

Blessed are we who allow ourselves to feel it—  
the impossibility  
of what was possible a second ago—  
the light decision, the casual stroll,  
the easy exchange and ordinary duty,  
a decent choice or a banal one,  
the sweep of hours on a day that was like any other,  
until it wasn't.

This is the place where nothing makes sense,  
This is the place where tears flow in earnest now.

Blessed are we who allow our hearts to break,  
for it will take some time  
for brittle unreality to release us from its grip,  
for the long and slow dissolve  
until we fully see  
what never should have been.

Blessed are we who ask you, God,

---

<sup>1</sup> Hodgin, Michael. *1002 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking* (p. 190), #159. Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

that grief find its way to move among us  
and be felt together, that comfort may flow  
in bonds of affection  
unbroken by this fresh tragedy.  
Though grief and tragedy and pain  
try to convince us otherwise,  
remind us that we are not alone.<sup>2</sup>

Her prayer echoes Jesus' words in John's Gospel,  
reminding us that we are not alone in our times of loss  
and grief. The 13th-century mystic writer Hadewijch of  
Antwerp reminds us that even in pain, healing will occur:

After storms, beautiful weather—  
We have seen this often.  
Anger, sometimes, then reconciliation—  
This makes Love enduring.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever grief and loss you may experience, when you  
feel you are alone, know that you are orphaned no more,  
for the promise of the presence of the Spirit remains with  
you, offering Comfort and Hope each day.

---

<sup>2</sup> Kate Bowler with Jessica Richie, *The Lives We Actually Have*, #31.

<sup>3</sup> *Love Is Everything: A Year with Hadewijch of Antwerp*, trans. Andrew Harvey, 161.