

**Reading:** John 15:9-17

**Text:** John 15:9 "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love."

**Theme:** *Mother's love is all that a person, a family, a church, a country, and our ever-troubled world really need*

The first person to have ever told me that I was loved was a girl; or let's say she was a young woman. And no, it was not Grace, or some other girls...it was my mother; and I love her dearly, because she first loved me. So, I want to wish her and all the mothers, the aunts, the grandmothers, the great-grandmothers of the world, and the mothers that have gone ahead of us to be with their God(s), a Happy Mother's Day!

After a detour to the book of Acts last Sunday, today I return to preaching from the gospel reading, which, for today, is from John 15:9-17. This is a continuation of Jesus' farewell speech, and the theme of today's passage is LOVE: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love (v9). ... This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (v12).

Now, Jesus has been talking about the law as love of God and love of neighbour all his ministry. You would have thought that the disciples should have had that lesson well bedded in their hearts and minds by now. So, why talk about love again and why make it a commandment?

Well, we need to remember that the gospels are accounts of Jesus' life and ministry that were written a long time after he was gone. So, what we read today was a remembering of Jesus by John's community, so they might continue to be nourished by Jesus' word of life.

It looks like things are not going well in John's community. It seems like there is discord among the members, and the leaders are revisiting the lessons that Jesus taught them for insights on resolving and managing conflicts in their church. Today's passage is about LOVE. It is something that can remedy the situation in John's community, but how does it look like, especially in practice?

In an effort to benefit from their memory of Jesus, the passage goes backward to recall what they saw, heard and learnt, and moves forward to how to apply those lessons as they try to repair fractured relationships. They are looking back to Jesus' love in action, like when he washed their feet in John 13.

They look at the implications for a way forward, and they notice that this love brings joy, and it also alters relationships for the better. For example, everyone will be at the same level; there will be no more master and slaves, but everyone will be a friend. Indeed, they are now a family, as members of the body of Christ, the Church.

But there is more: they have been chosen. This chosen-ness, however, is not something to brag about, or a feather in one's hat, but to bear fruits; that is, they are being called to show how to live out this love so their lives might be a witness to the gospel of Christ. So, what is this love, and how does it look like?

From the passage, it is the love of God the Father: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you ..." (v9). Interestingly, the love of the Father that Jesus is talking about is the love of a mother. That is, God the Father loves like a mother; or we can say, God is a Mother. This is consistent with Genesis 1, which presents God as male and female; the Hebrew word used for God in the text is plural, but there is one God.

Late Near East scholar, Kenneth Bailey, has shown in decades of living and researching in the Middle East that the God that Jesus knew behaved like a mother, though he referred to this God as, Abba (Daddy). The language of the New Testament, of course, is Greek, and the word for love that is used in the passage is ἀγάπη (agape), which Paul unpacks brilliantly in the famous 1 Corinthians 13.

Jesus would have spoken Greek, because that was the working language of the known world at the time, but his mother tongue was Aramaic. So, he would have used the Aramaic word for love, which is *racham*, which is translated mercy or compassion. *Racham* comes from *rachem*, which is the Aramaic word for womb.

This relationship between mercy/compassion and the womb means love (*racham*) in Aramaic is how a mother loves the child born of her own womb, or the love that people born of the same womb have for each other. That is, the kind of love that Jesus is loved by the Father is *racham*, but it buckets loads, greater than the collective *racham* of all women from the beginning to the end!

This, also, means, that God has a womb, which makes sense if God is a mother, and it is the best way to picture God's procreative activities that birthed and continues to birth creation and all that there is. This is the kind of love that the disciples are to abide with, for they are now a family, the body of Christ, the Church. And this love is all they need to heal their community, if they allow it to direct their lives.

And isn't it wonderful that as we celebrate Mother's Day, the lectionary assigns a gospel reading that talks about mother's love as the remedy to our troubled souls? To our troubled families? To our troubled churches? To our troubled countries? And to our troubled world? Think about it. A mother's love is the human love that is second only to God. That is what Jesus says, and we also know this from our own experiences of our mothers' love and care for us which, like that of God's love, it never ends, even when the whole world is against us, right to their last breaths. Like God's love, a mother's love is the only human love that we can trust and have faith in at all times, but especially at troubled times.

I am sure you can all recall many moments when your mothers were, essentially, God to you. I do also. There were many moments that I can remember in my own relationship with my mother that always warm my heart. But the time that stands out for me was when I first left home to attend intermediate school.

The school was about 14kms away from home and the closest bus stop to our village was 7 kms away. You see, we had no roads and we relied on footmobile to get from point A to point B. So I had to stay with relatives who lived close to the school. I was 11 and I really missed my parents and my siblings.

Now and then, I'd go home for the weekend. I would normally walk back to our relatives' place with other children from our village who were also attending schools away from home after lunch on Sundays. But sometimes, I would tell my parents that I did not want to go back to school. And my mother, in her gentle and reassuring way, would say, 'That's ok son. You can stay to Sunday night and I'd walk you back early on Monday morning'. That extra night at home was a gift that I always enjoyed; and around 4 o'clock on Monday morning, when the roosters crowed, mum would wake me up. And with torch in hand, she would walk me to our relatives' place, and then walked back home on her own.

The book of Proverbs (ch31) extolls the virtues of a capable wife, and how blessed is a man who is able to find her. I have to say, however, that individuals, families, churches, and countries are truly blessed if their mothers are given the chance to take charge of their affairs, because mothers are blessed with *racham*. We have seen this clearly in how our Scott Morrison would take sledge hammer to solve a tinny problem, often with disastrous outcomes, compared to Aotearoa's Jacinda Ardern who would use a softly and timely spoken word of compassion to achieve wonderful results.

We can say the same about Germany's Angela Merkel. Samoa should have been celebrating her first women Prime Minister by now, in the person of Fiame Mata'afa. Fiame has no natural children, but she has become a mother to the nation, just like her mother when she was alive. Unfortunately, the most corrupt politician that I know in the world (and I knew Marcos of the Philippines and Suharto of Indonesia), Samoa's caretaker PM, Sa'ilele Malielegaoi, aided by Chinese money, an unhinged Head of State, corrupt and fearful public servants, and MPs in his party who are more afraid of men than God, is doing everything he can, including trampling the laws he had made and the Justice system, to stop Fiame from forming government after Fiame won the national election a month ago. But I am confident that the will of God and of the people will prevail.

Our brokenness means that our tendencies when things do not go our ways are always to go down to the worst of our beings and behave like wild beasts, even if it means destroying everyone and relationships. But God's unending *racham* has saved us by sending his Son to show us how to live this life and to offer us life eternal.

That same love has been bestowed upon our mothers, and that is all that we really need in our lives, in the working of our families, in the proper functioning of our churches, in the progress of our countries, and in achieving peace and justice in our ever-troubled world.

So, Mothers, as the disciples were chosen to bring God-like love to their communities and to the world, so also have you been called by God to use your God-like love to bless your children, your families, your churches, your countries and the world, because he has shared his kind of love with you.

Enjoy your special Day, and Happy Mother's Day! Amen.