

## Just Like A Mother

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the 13th Sunday after Pentecost, September 2, 1990. Scripture Lessons: Exodus 19:1-9; Psalm 114; Matthew 23:34-39.

**IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.**

I want to direct your attention to the Old Testament lesson. It takes place about 1400 years before the birth of Jesus. The nation of Israel is in the desert wilderness at the foot of Mt Sinai where Moses is about to receive the 10 Commandments. The Lord had just saved Israel from slavery in Egypt. He enabled them to escape the armies of Egypt. He led them safely through the Red Sea.

Then the Lord calls to Moses. "Tell your people this. You saw what I, the LORD, did to the Egyptians and how I carried you as an eagle carries her young on her wings, and brought you here to me." **ANB**

Notice how God speaks of himself. "I carried you as an eagle carries her young on her wings, and brought you here." God speaks of himself as mother.

Maybe out in the wilderness the sight of eagles were common to the Israelites. Maybe one day they saw on one of the crags of Mount Sinai a great mother-eagle hovering over and around her nest, trying to tempt her fledgeling to take off for the first time into the air. But the little fellow, not knowing yet what wings <sup>are</sup> ~~was~~ for, refuses to leave the comfortable nest on the craggy ledge. So the mother-bird rises in the air above and with a sudden swoop strikes the nest and the young bird and <sup>it</sup> ~~sends them~~ hurtling out. ~~That did it.~~ The fledgeling is forced to fly now. And around him the mother-eagle flies, until at last the young bird's strength gives out. Immediately the mother sweeps suddenly under the fledgling and takes in on her outstretched wings and carries it to safety.

Israel was like that fledgling, hesitant and fearful about leaving the security of Egypt where they were slaves. But God forced them out of the nest, and like a mother bird carried them through the Red Sea to safety.

God is like a mother... like a great mother bird who carries her young on her wings to safety. Similar imagery is used of God in the New Testament where we hear the Lord Jesus say, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" <sup>Isaiah 66:13 "As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you."</sup>

What do you think of when you say 'God'? Every now and then it's good for us to be challenged about the nature of the God to whom we pray and in whom we trust. <sup>digression</sup> The Bible is our authority as Christians as to what we're to believe about God. What we believe and think of God should be based on what the Bible says. All of us, though, read the Bible with blinders. *You* might see things in the Bible that *I* might otherwise miss. That's why we need to meet in places like Sunday School, and small group Bible studies where we have the opportunity to discuss what we've seen and read in the Bible. This helps to open our eyes to what we've missed. It also helps to correct us what we've seen amiss.

Most of us know that the Bible uses many stories, parables, similes, and metaphors to tell us who God and what God does. For example, Psalm 23 is a favorite of many people. "The Lord is my shepherd." God's care for his people is described in terms of the relationship of a shepherd to a flock of sheep. That still evokes powerful feelings even though few of us have ever had very close contact with shepherds. We speak of God as the King of kings even though we overthrew a king to establish our independence 200 years ago and think of monarchy as an anachronism today.

Perhaps the most familiar term we use for God is "Father". Jesus called God "Abba" the Aramaic word for father. He taught us when we pray to say, "Our Father, who art in heaven." ~~To say God is our Father conveys one thing to an ancient tribesman whose father was a fearful figure with powers of life and death; another to the friends of Jesus whose fathers were kind providers; another to the Victorians whose fathers frown on us from gilt-framed paintings; and yet another to a generation raised on the image of Archie Bunker as a bigotted, bumbling clown (cf. D.H.C. Read, ET, LXXXVI, p. 145)~~

~~What amazes me, though, is the wealth of metaphors the Bible uses to tell us who God is and what God does. Many of these we simply don't see.~~

But One of the most amazing metaphors that's so easy to overlook is found in our Scripture Lessons this morning where God is described as a mother. 1

I really find it remarkable that the Biblical writers, living as they did, in a patriarchal society, in a society where women were often treated like property rather than human beings, spoke of God in terms of a mother. It shows us that God's qualities and actions can't be spoken of in exclusively male terms. The Bible speaks of God, not only as a divine Shepherd and a King and a Father, but also as a Mother.

A child wakes up in the middle of the night frightened and calls out, "Mom!" Dad remains sound asleep, but the mother hears and rouses herself out of bed. Sometimes it's in the winter and the floor is cold and the mother walks barefoot to the child's room. Sometimes the mother has worked hard all day and yet she manages to wake herself at the call of her child. She hears her children's cry and comes and cradles and comforts the frightened child. God is like that.

Or a child is playing out in the yard on a warm, sunny day. She's running bare-foot through the grass. She doesn't see the bumble-bee, steps on it and is stung. She cries out in pain and comes running to her mother who stretches out her arms and lifts the child into her comforting arms.

G.A. Studdert-Kennedy was a chaplain in the trenches during WWI. He spoke of how strong grown men who'd been drinking and swearing and wenching and acting tough hours before would, when wounded and dying in their fox-holes far away from home, cry out for their mothers.

David H.C. Read, recently retired from Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City, was a prisoner of war during WWII. Once he came across a dying man suffering horribly from a grenade wound. He was a rough, tough, burly man but he was crying in his pain. When Dr. Read bent down to minister to him the poor dying man begged Read to sing to him an old Sunday School hymn, "Safe in the arms of Jesus". Dr. Read was struck by the incongruity of singing this hymn (that speaks of resting in the arms of Jesus) to such a rough looking man. Without a doubt the man was thinking of his mother and how she used to sing hymns while he rested safely in her arms as a little boy.

In 1906 the steamship *General Slacum* sank in New York Harbor while carrying about 1500 passengers on a Sunday school outing. It was one of the great marine disasters, and it nearly wiped out a New York City church. Among the few picked up from the water and rescued was a boy who said, "My mother gave me a life preserver, and that's how I got saved. I guess she didn't have any for herself, because they can't find her." The Bible tells us that God loves us like that (Albert P. Stauderman, *Let Me Illustrate*).

Tillie Maczek was a Polish immigrant who settled in Chicago. In 1944 she put an ad in a Chicago newspaper, "\$5000 reward for information leading

to the arrest of the killers of Officer Lundy in 1932." Investigation revealed that her son Joe had been sentenced to life in prison for the alleged murder although he insisted on his innocence. No one believed <sup>him</sup> poor Polish immigrant but his mother. She was hardly able to speak English and her husband had been a stockyard worker who died shortly after their marriage leaving her to raise her boy all by herself. Tillie scrubbed floors in Chicago office buildings for year, ~~scrimping~~ and saving until she finally had \$5000 saved up from her meager pay. She then put the ad in the paper offering all she had for information that would acquit her son. The ad attracted attention. The newspaper itself became interested in the case and took up her cause. Joe was eventually found innocent and released from prison. His mother's faith and devotion had purchased his freedom (Albert P. Stauderman; *Let Me Illustrate*). God's sacrifice and love for us purchases our release from the prison house of sin and leads us to freedom.

When the Bible speaks of God in terms of a mother it's trying to tell us how much the living God cares for us-- as deeply and truly as one human being can ever care for another. Nearly everybody in America believes in God or a supreme being. But what difference does this God make? Is God simply a creator. Is God out of date in our modern society like shepherds and kings have become? Is it possible for us to believe that this supreme being, this creator of the universe cares for us like a mother? *Will carry us as an eagle carries her young on her wings ~~about~~?*

Let us pray: Gracious and tender God, you delivered your children from the house of bondage in Egypt as an eagle carries her young on her wings. Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child, like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home, you are faithful. We trust in you and want to find safety beneath the shadow of your wings. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Pastoral Prayer

Lord God, your eyes are open day and night watching your children; your ears are always ready to listen to their prayer. We have come to worship you. We come as sinners, in need of your forgiveness. We come tired from our work, in need of refreshment and recreation. We come with worries, in need of your guidance. Lift us out of our preoccupation with our own needs. Allow us to see you with the eyes of faith and to hear with understanding what you have said to us in the written and preached word. Make us thankful for all the good we've received from you. Awaken in us a longing to do what's right. Make us aware of the great company, past and present with whom we join to worship you.

We pray for the young people of our church as they go back to school. ... Tabitha ...

We pray for teachers as they go back to their classrooms and students.

We pray especially for the Solanco school district <sup>teachers union + school board</sup> which is still without a contract.

We pray for our nation, our President and for all those in authority, for those in the service and in diplomacy... that you would lead us in the way that is right.

We pray for the nations of the world and their leaders and for their dealings with one another; for the breaking down of barriers of race and color; for political freedom; for educational development and for a more just economic structure. Enable the nations of the world to turn to you in faith so that they can receive the healing which they most need. Grant to your Church throughout the world the power of your Holy Spirit to speak the truth in love and do those things which will bring glory to you.

We pray for the workers of America and of the world. We thank you for every kind of honest employment. We pray for labor unions and for those in management, we pray that they may use the powers they possess wisely and well, and contribute to the well being of all of society. Bless all meetings between employers and employees. Remove all bitterness, distrust and prejudice from their relationships. Give to all a spirit of tolerance, and an earnest desire to seek for justice and for truth.

Remember the needs of our parish and its members.

Remember Cynthia Sawaya's mother.  
Remember Judi Jefferis sister and baby.  
Remember...

Remember Apple Festival -

Remember those who have moved in houses  
... refugees ... hostages.

Remember ... anniversaries

Remember Newby Weds

And now as Christ our Savior has taught us...