

**Mother's Day Sermon<sup>1</sup>, TUMC, 2017**  
**John 14:1-14**

Today's sermon might be a bit of a reprise of past sermons, but if the reprise is a good technique in music maybe it's okay in sermons too. Sometimes there is comfort in the repetition of the familiar.

I'm going to begin this sermon by repeating something I said in a Mother's day sermon a few years ago.

It's a quote from Meister Eckhart.

We are all meant to be mothers of God because God is always needing to be born.

And at that time too, I said that mother of God sermons might be a more appropriate theme at Christmas when we repeat the stories of Mary and her

“yes” to God

and her “yes” to bringing God into the world through Jesus,

but it is no less important in the season of Easter, when new life is thrusting itself forth all around us, in a full riot of colour and every possible shade of green and heralded by bird song every morning.

The experience of giving birth in all its forms is what comes after we have said “yes,” a “yes” to nurturing growth and a yes to participating in the bringing forth of new life.

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“Yes” to an active participation in life is as important or more important now than ever, no matter what our age or stage or experience of gender, the opportunity to say yes to participation in the life of God in the world matters.

The earth is groaning with its longing for us to understand what this means.

With this sermon I want to take you into a prayerful understanding of what it means to participate in the life of God, and the life of God’s creation, and the life that mother earth gives birth to each and every year.

I’m going to start from an unlikely place at first. I’m going to begin with John 14:1-14

In this text, Jesus has just told his disciples that he is leaving them, he’s going where they cannot follow

And he tells them this after they had left everything to do exactly that – to follow him.

And he had brought them so much joy and abundant life

by turning water into wine

by giving them bread to eat

bringing light into their darkness

calming their storms

giving sight to the blind

movement to the paralyzed

and resurrection to the dead man Lazarus

And now he is going to leave. They know it is true, they suspect his death and they are afraid.

But he calls them friends

and into their fear and grief as the reality of his news sinks in

He tells them,

Let not your heart be troubled

Believe in God, Believe also in me,

In my Father's house are many dwelling places.

And when the disciples demonstrate a typical Johanine

misunderstanding by asking questions like "Where are you going, and how can we know the way?" – typically a foil in John for Jesus to explain further or more deeply what he means

Jesus tells them that they know the way,

because he will come and take them to where he is. (his life has shown them the way)

And that where he is (as a living Christ, where all the things that he did when he was with them come to be or keep being realized) that is where the Father is also.

If they have seen him they have seen the Father.

And if they don't believe his words

then they should believe his works,

I listed them before.  
light in the darkness,  
sight for the blind  
food for the hungry  
movement for the paralyzed  
calm in the storm  
life out of death,

Jesus continues -

if you believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me, then you will be able to do these works and greater works than these – because I go to the Father.

I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask for anything I will do it.

The words and works and signs of Jesus in John, that demonstrate the Father or the Divine parent to us  
are all these things that bring abundant life and joy  
and all the things that I've already listed twice above, sight, healing, feeding, peace, movement and life

But if we are going to participate in the divine life, the union with Jesus as Jesus is in union with the father or divine parent, then we are actually going to have to ask for things in line with the life that he wants to bring about, the new creation, that his life and death and resurrection inaugurated.

We are going to have to ask him for things and last time I checked asking Jesus for something is called prayer.  
and so in the rest of the sermon I want to talk about prayer  
invite us into prayer  
and invite us into prayerful participation in the life force of creation.

In keeping with the theme of reprise, I'm going to begin with a familiar prayer,  
then move on to a slightly less familiar prayer but one that I've mentioned previously in a sermon  
and conclude with a very simple body prayer.

The first and most familiar prayer we know as the "Our Father"

Our Father who is in heaven.  
Hallowed be your name.

This prayer was one of Jesus' attempts to invite us, his followers into the same intimacy with the divine that he experienced.

But it was more than that,  
it was also political.

In the Roman era where Ceasar was the great father of the people or representative of God on earth (and other eras, like Hitler and Stalinism where the political leaders were considered by some as fathers to their country – or they took on that designation for themselves)

Jesus invites us to pray to God our Father in heaven, - ie in contrast to the one on the earthly throne,

And/But this Father in heaven was not meant as a prayer to a completely transcendent inaccessible God, as we have sometimes supposed, rather in ancient understanding the heavens and the earth were considered part of the known creation, so a God in the heavens was also God of the Creation and therefore among us as well.

This God in heaven ranked higher than the earthly ruler and was ONE who could bring justice in a way the earthly ruler never would, hence the next line:

Your kingdom come – (as opposed to the imperfect and often oppressive kingdoms that we experience here)

Your will be done on earth as in heaven – as in your heavenly kingdom that is coming to earth, that is infiltrating this earth with the life and love taught and demonstrated by Jesus.

Give us this day our daily bread – yes, the basics and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors, because so much of oppression is based on exploiting others for our own gain. Many scholars believe that originally this prayer really meant debts and not sins or trespasses as we have come to use it, but in God's world both kinds of forgiveness both for debts and sins matter.

Lead us not into temptation (for these things do come)

but deliver us from evil (because the nature of humanity is that we are prone to do what we should not)

for Yours (not Ceasars) is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

This prayer and the praying of this prayer reminds us of the world that we are invited to participate in, the world that we are to ask for in Jesus name.

Now, in a world where the Divine parent can also be viewed helpfully as a mother and particularly fitting on Mother's day,

There is an Our Mother prayer.

As part of the reprise,

I first shared this prayer with you during a summer sermon when we were talking about different heroes of faith – and I told you about Miriam Therese Winter, of the Medical missionary sisters.

She wrote this prayer – directed to God, not directed to Mary the mother of God as some have supposed.

This is a prayer very much in line with the Our Father, but using Mother instead,

It begins, Our Mother who is within us, (very much in keeping with the Johanine theology that emphasizes the divine union between Jesus and the Father and that that same union is available to all of Jesus' friends.)

For those of us who are women, sometimes it really helps to imagine God as the Feminine Divine/God who dwells within us, after all we too have been created in the Divine image. Since both men and women have been created in the Divine image, in fact all persons on the gender continuum have been created in the Divine image and God cannot be limited to Father imagery, the Our Mother stretches our theological thinking in a helpful way.

Our Mother who is within us

We celebrate your many names –

God has many names, beginning biblically with

I am who I am. When Moses asked God for God's name God's answer was, I am who I am or I will be who I will be and many faithful Jewish people today will not attempt to utter the name of God, but say instead, "the name," or "the eternal one,"

In the book of John, the "I am" as revealed to us through Jesus is repeated often in

I am living water,

I am light

I am the bread

I am the resurrection and the life. The name of God is applied over and over again to Jesus in many ways.

Back to this beautifully solid prayer.

Our Mother who is within us

We celebrate your many names.

Your wisdom come, your will be done

unfolding from the depths within us (another nod to the ability of the divine to reside not just out there, transcendentally, but also imminently as God with us, God within us).

And "Your wisdom come" – the wisdom we pray for here is all those things that Jesus embodied and that God's good creation reveals.

Each day you give us all that we need – (daily bread and more – both food and security).



You remind us of our limits and we let go – (acknowledging our human nature and inviting relinquishment of our limits to God).

You support us in our power and we act with courage (acknowledging our human capacity for good as well – especially when we dwell in a world where God is our support).

For you are the dwelling place within us (communally we know that God is here).

the empowerment around us (communally with God among us we can do so much more than we can alone).

and the celebration among us (and we were created to praise our maker with our breath).

Now and forever amen.

Together these two prayers provide the balance of transcendent/immanent God that we have come to know so beautifully through the Johanne Jesus.

When we pray in this way we will find ourselves praying in his name.

And it is after all Mother's Day. Would it not be correct to honour the creating power of God in a prayer to Our Mother who is within us?

So let's pray these prayers together, and as we do let our minds imagine how these prayers equip us to say yes to participation in the life of God or more dramatically how they equip us to give birth to God in the world.

Our Father who is in heaven

Hallowed be your name  
Your kingdom come  
Your will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven  
Give us this day our daily bread  
and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors  
and lead us not into temptation  
and deliver us from evil  
For Yours  
is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever Amen.

Our Mother who is within us  
we celebrate your many names  
Your wisdom come,  
Your will be done  
Unfolding from the depths within us  
Each day you give us all that we need  
You remind us of our limits and we let go  
You support us in our power and we act with courage  
for you are the dwelling place within us  
the empowerment around us and  
the celebration among us  
now and forever amen.

But Birth giving requires more than words  
Giving birth requires our bodies

and so I want to invite us to participate in one last prayer that you can do while you are sitting and I will demonstrate it sitting, but as you do the very simple motions that I demonstrate

I invite you to open yourselves to power of the movement.

and simply pay attention to how it feels to you to pray this way.

By the way our Junior Youth inspired me to pray with you this way

because last week when I visited their class at Peter Haresnape's invitation, when I arrived they were participating in a prayer that used their arms, similar to, but not quite the same as the one I'm going to invite you to participate in with me this morning.

### *Body Prayer*

Now breathe – there is no giving birth and participating in the life of God without breath.

Take a breath,

Now

reach your hands towards the earth – at whatever height is comfortable to you.

Think about the earth.

Allow it's energy to flow up into your body. God made you from the earth, from the same elements as the earth.

*adam* – human - was made from *adamah* - the humus of the earth.

Reach gently for the earth and receive what she has for you this morning. *(pause)*

Receive her groan for you to help her.

Receive her life and all that she wants to give you.

And now gently turn your hands and bless her for a moment. *(pause)*  
Spend a moment being grateful for the food she has produced for you,  
for her beauty.

Now turn your hands again and bring them up in front of you.

Hold your gratitude in front of your heart for all you have received here  
in your hands in front of you.

Now take all that you have received and all for which you are grateful  
and release them out into the universe,

back to God from which you and the earth come

and now release all that you have been given to those around you.

Amen

Mother earth, the wisdom that creator has placed within the earth,  
wants to be the midwife of the birthing you will do in this world  
and Jesus says

Ask for whatever you will in my name and I will do it.

In Jesus name

means with joy and abundant life

healing for the sick,

peace in conflict,

food for the hungry,

movement for the paralyzed.

Say yes to participation in Jesus' life and He will live in you

just as he is in the father/mother

and the mother/father lives in him

all this can live in you and be born from you.

All glory be to God the mother/father of us all.

Amen.