



University Christian Church

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## **Mothering God's New**

Pentecost, a, May 11, 2008

Acts 2:1-21

Three weeks ago, at the urging of a plant lover, I bought a little cucumber plant and dutifully prepared to plant it in the crumbled limestone of the hill in our backyard that we call euphemistically call "dirt." I dug the hole, pulled the tenacious weeds from the surrounding area, put some good potting soil in the hole around it, built a little dike around it trap whatever moisture might roll down its hill, and dreamed of the processes leading to it growing healthy and strong, while at the same time mentally preparing myself for it to die. What was I thinking when I bought this thing? Could anything grow in this stuff but the yucca plants and wildflowers?

Now, each day I look at the little plant growing out there quite well, I must confess – despite my lack of faith in it- I'm reminded not to underestimate the wondrous adaptive processes of God provides God's creatures. Yes, it is doing fine, but if I hadn't had the courage or the foolishness to go ahead and plant it despite my lack of confidence, we certainly wouldn't have cukes this year.

On Pentecost morning it is good for us to remember that usually God's gifts are given to us only in embryonic form: seeds that must be prompted to grow by the nurture we provide.

For example, it is interesting to note that while we celebrate today, this very weekend, in fact, exactly 100 years of celebrations of Mother's Day here in the United States of America, that the impetus for it began 38 years earlier when Julia Ward Howe tried to institute a Mothers Day of Peace throughout the world. Coming out of the horrendous our Civil War just 5 years earlier and riveted upon both the injustices and the corporate pain that war inflicted upon our nation, Julia Ward Howe an activist and a prophet in the spirit of Acts, Chapter 2, encouraged other women to stand up and to speak out for their yearnings and their interests, to declare that war is always the worst alternative. She said:

Arise, then, women of this day!

Arise, all women who have hearts,

Whether our baptism be of water or of tears!

Say firmly:

"We will not have great questions decided by irrelevant agencies,

Our husbands will not come to us, reeking with carnage, for caresses and applause.

Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn

All that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy and patience.

We, the women of one country, will be too tender of those of another country

To allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs."

From the bosom of the devastated Earth a voice goes up with our own.

It says: "Disarm! Disarm! The sword of murder is not the balance of justice."

Blood does not wipe out dishonor, nor violence indicate possession.

As men have often forsaken the plough and the anvil at the summons of war,  
 Let women now leave all that may be left of home for a great and earnest  
 day of counsel.

Let them meet first, as women, to bewail and commemorate the dead.  
 Let them solemnly take counsel with each other as to the means  
 Whereby the great human family can live in peace,  
 Each bearing after his own time the sacred impress, not of Caesar,  
 But of God.

In the name of womanhood and humanity, I earnestly ask  
 That a general congress of women without limit of nationality  
 May be appointed and held at someplace deemed most convenient  
 And at the earliest period consistent with its objects,  
 To promote the alliance of the different nationalities,  
 The amicable settlement of international questions,  
 The great and general interests of peace.<sup>1</sup>

Julia Ward Howe was herself the mother of six children, but in this powerful address, in this challenge to people to stand up and make dramatic changes in the way conflict is resolved, she was taking the nurturing of Motherhood to a whole new level. She was MOTHERING GOD'S NEW WORLD into being, the world as it had been envisioned millennia earlier in the Isaiah's prophecy, "they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (Is. 2:4).

And if we are focusing on the value of nurturing, of calling forth the best from what is a wide range of possibilities in any moment, then it is not so much of

a stretch for us to embrace one of the foundational principles of what is known today as process theology. Process theology is a way of thinking that has been becoming more widely embraced in Christian circles for the last half-century or so. Process theology's God is not up in heaven somewhere determining what takes place on earth. In fact, a great deal of what takes place on earth runs counter to God's will. In this view, it is an unhelpful piety that blithely advises the suffering to accept whatever comes their way in life or befalls their neighbor by describing it as "God's will," or, "It was their time." No, my friend, God desires so much more.

In process theology God has a yearning, a desire for a wholesome, loving resolution for every particular circumstance, in every particular life, yet even though God cares deeply, God is not in the business of interfering to make that happen, to force the conclusion.

The powerful image is that of God who is luring us into the future, coaxing, coaching, us and all other living beings forward & and upward. Just as God brought forth the universe and building blocks of all we know:

Bringing Life out of inert matter; then

Evolving new species of animals and plants in infinite variation;

and finally in human life – not only consciousness, but then self-consciousness that can see ourselves, and discern for ourselves how well or how poorly we conform to the Divine designs.

One of the fascinating corollaries to this Process Theology way of thinking is that if God is not in charge of all that transpires here, and if God is giving us guidance, God is coaching in a particular direction, then it is our action for good or ill, which becomes so much bigger a part of the picture. God is calling us to be Co-creators with God in a new and better future.

Sometimes- such as this morning- we must wonder whether God is wise is trusting us in that fashion. Consider that today, people in Myanmar are dying by the thousands, even while the spirit of God is working in the hearts and minds of other people all over the planet who are aware of the disaster, working in the minds of ambassadors and board members of non-governmental organizations, United Nations officials, and you, yourself as you prepare to give, to bring some assistance to the people in dire need, in all those people who believe that they hear a call to compassion, a call that you and I would recognize as emanating from the living spirit of God.

But there is a resistance, in this case and in so many others. There is the self interest in the hearts and the minds of the ruling junta. We read yesterday that the generals ruling Myanmar are relabeling the few aid boxes let in so far with names of those generals themselves, contemptuously proclaiming that they- in reality the obstacles to adequate aid- are its providers.

And while we rightly seethe in response, we must admit that their motivation is not far from each of our hearts, either. It comes to us early in life, as many of you mother's day mothers can attest.

One morning a diligent mother was preparing pancakes for her two sons, Kevin, age 5, and Ryan, age 3. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Their thoughtful mother saw in the squabble an opportunity for a moral lesson. So she said, "If Jesus were sitting here, He would say, 'Let my brother have the first pancake. I can wait.'" Kevin turned to his younger brother and said, "Ryan, you be Jesus!"

Yes, there is selfishness that runs deep in the human psyche, a frequently overwhelming resistance to the wholesome guidance that would be best for all.

Once my young nephew, Ben, at about aged 3 was reminded that his mother expected a particular behavior from him. His response said it all. "I am my own mother."

As Christians we recognize that one of the finest ways that God has demonstrated for us that love, is by providing for us a clear picture of where it is we are to go, how it is we are to develop. It was in our hearing of the message that Jesus brought us: the message of love, and how that leads to forgiveness. The message of compassion for others and now that directs us to live no longer simply focused on what it is that we or our family need; but on what is best for the entire human community. The disciples of Jesus followed him and learned from him, absorbed the graciousness and the compassion of his spirit and recognized that that was their call, too.

But our Bible tells us that that was not enough. Even though they had been keenly aware of the ongoing presence of Jesus after his death, they themselves still lived miserable broken lives for a time. Surely, they understood that God had infused the life of Jesus, but their knowledge had not protected them from being beaten down and distraught.

And then something new happened. The Scriptures tell us that it had been forecasted by Jesus when he said to them, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (*Acts 1:8*)

And 50 days later, the blessing arrived. The Spirit came like a powerful rushing wind that blew away all their fear and broke the chains of their hesitation. They were empowered by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Do you wonder how you can find that in your life? Do you wonder how you can live out the fullness of your call as a human being? My sisters and brothers,

we have a model in Jesus Christ. We have a model in how the earliest Christian church, breaking free from the fears of Roman oppression and restrictions of religious convention. They took the message of freedom that they found in Christ, of the new life that was available, to Jerusalem, and Judea, and Samaria, and all the world. And then they called each succeeding generation of Christians, all the way down to you and me, to follow them in that mission, Mothering God's New World in being.

Let us pray:

Come Holy Spirit, breathe power & courage & boldness into the hearts of your children gathered here, using us under your guidance to show your loving power to all the world.... The world that you call us to serve.... in Christ's name, Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mother%27s\\_Day\\_Proclamation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mother%27s_Day_Proclamation)