

## ***A Woman Who Knows Her Son***

A Message for Sunday Morning Worship on Mother's Day

May 9, 2021 – 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Eastertide

United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC, Pawcatuck, CT

Text: John 2:1-11

Motherhood is made up of many moments. It is an accumulation of millions of experiences, thoughts and feelings, good and bad, as life meanders through the days and weeks of life. Mother's Day, was originally envisioned by Julia Ward Howe in 1870. If her name is familiar, and it should be, it's because she wrote "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," the song which became emblematic of the northern Armies of the Republic during the Civil War. In her original thoughts on Mother's Day, She did not see it as the glorification of motherhood it has become, laden with flowers and candy and perfume and lavish meals all to express our appreciation to our mothers as the unsung heroes of hearth and home. No, Julia Ward Howe's original vision, just five short years after the end of the war she herself glorified in song, was for what she called "a Mother's Peace Day" which would be dedicated to the eradication of war. After experiencing the horror that was the Civil War in this country, she became convinced that if all mothers could unite in the common cause of encouraging "their sons to 'unlearn war'," they could change the course of humankind. She believed that if mothers the world over could teach their sons, and daughters, to see the supposed enemy as the children of other mothers, they would not be able to injure them as war requires. (Sister Eileen's message in the weekly newsletter from Mercy by the Sea, May 6, 2021) This is indeed a glorious vision, and one which bears little resemblance to Mother's Day as it has become.

Personally, I have always seen Mother's Day as a day to honor mothers, certainly, but more importantly all the women whose presence in our lives have made each of us who we are. Part of me dreads this holiday, I admit, not because of Mother's Day itself but instead because of the controversy over this day which erupts annually on the various clergy chat groups I participate in. In these forums, Mother's Day evokes passionate emotions, pro and con. Some of the most vitriolic emotions expressed regarding any topic I have experienced always begin to circulate around Mother's Day as the people passionately opposed to its very existence try to

build their arguments as to why the church of today needs to leave this holiday in the rearview mirror. Their reasoning for this can be distilled down to three reasons Mother's Day needs to go away:

- 1) Not everyone had a good mother; Children from dysfunctional households and those who grew up in the foster care group home system are wounded by this day;
- 2) Not every woman is a mother and all women are equally important, whether or not they have borne children and as such; this celebration is the antithesis of the feminist movement;
- 3) Mother's Day is too painful for women who have had miscarriages, stillbirths, or lost their children to accident or illness or some other horrible event.

All three of these arguments against Mother's Day are valid, and very true. But, as a card-carrying feminist before I even understood what a feminist was, I still love Mother's Day.

I love Mother's Day even though I have not once gotten breakfast in bed, or even a cup of coffee I didn't make myself as the day begins. I love Mother's Day even though my family runs out for cards on Saturday evening (sometimes Sunday morning). While I deeply treasure these moments, the truth is I love Mother's Day, not because I am a mother. I love Mother's Day not because I gave birth to two amazing kids, not because I am now a doting grandmother. I love Mother's Day because it is a day when I am encouraged to pause and remember all the amazing, incredible women who made me who I am today. In the final analysis Mother's Day is not about giving birth. It's about being borne into a life blessed with all sorts of incredible, amazing, life-changing women who all too often stay in the background of our days, just doing what they do. Mother's Day brings all those incredible women into the foreground of our lives for just a moment, shining a bright light of gratitude and appreciation on these amazing women just doing their own thing in every corner of our lives. The simple truth is, we just don't see them most of the time. Today we do, and that, dear ones, is what Mother's Day is about. Make no mistake that I do understand and acknowledge that not all women regard Mother's Day with joy, hunkering down until its over and that's okay. My prayers are

with all of those women this day. Still, Mother's Day is upon us and I for one am very glad it is.

Some of you are familiar with the writings of historian Heather Cox Richardson, an American historian who teaches at Boston College. Her writings, for some of us at least, have been a lifeline for keeping the current political realities in perspective. Her essay for today was something entirely different, as she chose to write about Mother's Day. She wrote from a perspective that seems to be very close to my own, so I would like to share her essay for today in its entirety: *(read; copy attached)*

In conclusion this morning, I'd like to tell you about one more mother, an amazing woman whose life was built of a kind of faith and core internal strength most of us never attain. Her name was Mary and she lived over 2000 years ago, halfway around the world. She became a mother in the most unusual way possible – or impossible when you stop to think about it. But her becoming a mother is not what matters today. What matters is that she was a woman who knew her son, better than anyone else. She and her son and a bunch of his friends went to a family wedding and it was a huge affair, so huge that in no time at all the hosts ran out of wine. When she realized this was happening, she went to her son to tell him. And, in typical young adult son fashion, he retorted “woman, what business is that of mine?” Undeterred, she went to the caterers and told them to do whatever her son told them to do. Sure enough, he soon sauntered over to the head server and told him and his staff to refill with water these six gigantic stone jars which were now empty. They did. Mary's son wandered away as the chief server checked the contents of the now refilled water jars only to find they now contained an excellent wine, better than anything else they had been serving. The story ends here in the text, but we know it didn't really end there. Mary, hearing all the surprise and enthusiasm over this delightful new wine as it spread through the throng of wedding guests, looked over at her son. He was trying really hard to disappear into the clump of his friends but at that moment, he glanced over his shoulder at his mom and smiled. She smiled back, knowing the world had changed forever in that moment when her son – Jesus – claimed his birthright as God's Son. Thanks be to God. Amen.

# May 8, 2021

Heather Cox Richardson May 9

Those of us who are truly lucky have more than one mother. They are the cool aunts, the elderly ladies, the family friends, even the mentors who whip us into shape. By my count, I've had at least eight mothers. One of the most important was Sally Adams Bascom Augenstern.

Mrs. A., a widow who had played cutthroat bridge with my grandmother in the 1950s, lived near my family in Maine in the summer. I began vacuuming and weeding and painting for her when I was about 12, but it wasn't long before my time at her house stopped being a job. She was bossy, demanding, sharp as a tack... and funny and thoughtful, and she remembered most of the century. She would sit in her rocking chair by the sunny window in the kitchen, shelling peas and telling me stories while I washed the floor with a hand sponge to spin out the time.

Sally (not Sarah) Bascom was born on December 25, 1903. (For folks in Maine keeping score, that made her almost a full year older than Millard Robinson, a fact she loathed.) She was the oldest of six children and spent her youth taking care of the younger ones. When I once asked her what was the most important historical event in her lifetime, this woman who had lived through the Depression and both world wars answered without hesitation: "the washing machine." It had freed her and her mother from constant laundry. She could finally have some leisure time, which she spent listening to the radio and driving in cars with boys. Because her mother always needed her at home, it was not she, but all her younger siblings, who went to college. By the time Mrs. A. was an adult, she was certain she wanted no part of motherhood.

Mrs. A. never forgave her sister for driving her Model T through a field. She saved aluminum foil not because of WWII, but because of WWI. She supported herself and refused to marry until she met an older man who offered to take her traveling; they had a quickie wedding and set off for Banff, where they looked at mountains and watched the bears pilfer trash.

She destroyed her knees playing tennis, so she would weed the garden by staggering to a lawn chair set up there. She loved snapdragons and nicotiana, veronica and irises and wild roses. After Mr. Augenstern died, she drove herself to and from Florida once a year in a giant old Cadillac with "Arrive Alive" on the license plate holder; she drove like a bat out of hell. She played bridge with terrifying intensity. And she always refused to be seen in public unless she was in a dress with her hair pinned up and her pearls on.

Mrs. A. laughed at me when I fell in love with history and tried to tell her that people changed the world because of their beliefs. "Follow the money, Heather," said the woman whose income depended on her knowledge of the stock market. "Don't pay attention to what they say; pay attention to who's getting the money." I listened. And then I learned as I watched her lose my grandmother's generation and then work to make friends with my mother's generation. And when they, too, died, she set out, in her eighties, to make friends with my generation. Every day was a new day.

Mrs. A. left me her linens, her gardening coat, and this photo of her and her siblings: Frances (who died young), Phyllis, Carlton, Guy, and Nathan. She also left me ideas about how to approach both history and life. I've never met a woman more determined never to be a mother, but I'm pretty sure that plan was one of the few things at which she failed.

Thinking of her, and all the wonderful women like her who mother without the title, on this Mother's Day.