

For the people of St. Philip's  
Year C, Sixth Sunday of Easter  
May 13, 2007  
"My peace I give to you."  
Maria Hoecker, preacher

Happy Mothers' Day. While all of you may not be mothers, I'm fairly certain that you all have or have had mothers, so I'll offer these words today in their honor. I'm going to begin this morning with a little history on the origins of Mothers' Day. Or in this case you might say I'm going to begin this homily with the re-telling of HERstory.

The movement to start a Mothers' Day began in 1870 by a woman named Julia Ward Howe. You may recognize her name. She is the author of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." Now, here in North Carolina, I don't know if that song was sung much, but it was sung a lot in Kansas.

After the War Between the States, Julia Ward Howe was devastated by the plight of the war widows who could not make a living wage and the condition of their children. The year was 1870, around five years after the war. Her desire to establish a day honoring mothers was driven by the lasting results of war and the devastation that it had wrought on families. Thousands and thousands of men were killed in the bloodiest war ever fought in the history of this country. Thousands upon thousands of women had suddenly become heads of households yet they had no pension, no education, no jobs, and no vote. Too many women were living with the reality of dead sons, children with no fathers, dead husbands and brothers. Generations of families were forever lost. The children in the land were starving in the burnt-out countryside.

Initially Julia Ward Howe's vision was to have Independence Day, July Fourth, serve also as Mother's Day in order that this would be transformed from a day of glorifying war to a day celebrating peace. It could become a day in which women would come together and work towards peace in all areas of life.

This is part of what she wrote in 1870 in a proclamation delivered in Boston. At this time the Franco-Prussian War was sweeping through Europe. War-ravaged immigrants were pouring into these barely united states seeking a new start in a New World.

Arise, then, women of this day!  
Arise all women who have hearts, whether our baptism be that of water or of fears!

Say firmly: "We will not have great questions decided by irrelevant agencies. Our husbands shall 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 women of one country will be too tender to 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 our dishonor nor violence indicate possession. As men have often forsaken the plow 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 then solemnly take counsel with each other as to the means whereby the great human family can live in peace, each bearing after their own time the sacred impress, not of Caesar, but of God."

For the next 30 years, June 2<sup>nd</sup> became the day that Americans celebrated Mothers' Day for Peace. Later in her life, Julia Ward Howe reflected on the results of this proclamation.

The little document which I drew up in the heat of my enthusiasms implored women, all the world over, to awake to the knowledge of the sacred right vested in them as mothers to protect the human life which costs them so many pangs. I did not doubt but that my appeal would find a ready response in the hearts of great numbers of women throughout the limits of civilization. ....I devoted the next two years almost entirely to correspondence with various women in leading countries. I also had two important meetings in New York, at which the cause for peace and the ability of women to promote it were earnestly presented.

"However," she writes, The ladies who spoke in public in those days mostly confined their labors to the advocacy of women's suffrage (their right to vote), and were not much interested in my scheme of a world-wide protest of women against the cruelties of war."

The women who conceived Mother's Day 137 years ago would be bewildered now by the onslaught of ads that hound us to find that "perfect gift for Mom". They would expect women to be marching in the streets, not eating with their families in restaurants. Mother's Day began as a vision for commemorating the collective strength that women could muster for peace.

Many women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century believed that they bore a special responsibility as actual or potential mothers to care for the casualties of society and to turn America into a more civilized nation. They were on a mission from God, guided by the Words of Jesus Christ. Without the power of a single vote, they played a leading role in the abolition of slavery. Women launched successful campaigns against lynching and consumer fraud. They battled for improved working conditions for women and protection for children during the Industrial Revolution. Women led the march for social assistance for the poor, public health services, and they fought society's ongoing abuse of alcohol. I come from a state that produced Carrie Nation, who with her hatchet smashed the saloon in my family's little town of Enterprise, KS and other towns throughout the Midwest. We have an old, old photograph in our family of

Carrie Nation, the wife of an alcoholic, proudly being led to the Enterprise city jail.

In 1913, Congress declared Mother's Day to be the second Sunday in May. By then, the growing consumer culture had successfully redefined women as consumers for their families. Since then Mother's Day has blossomed into a billion-dollar industry. Scarcely what Julia Ward Howe could have imagined for this day set aside for peace. (story by Ruth Rosen)

Indeed, this is a day set aside for the commemoration of peace. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you."

Today Jesus calls us to remember that he gives to us not as the world gives. We need not fear that he is going away. He is preparing for the end that is a beginning. He will return to God, but he will leave behind the Holy Spirit for us all. The Holy Spirit, the manifestation of God's love that binds us all together.

Jesus tells his disciples of this Advocate that the Father will send us. Though Jesus is giving us his farewell discourse, he assures us that we will not be left unattended. His assurance is clear, the Holy Spirit will guide us toward all that we need to know and remind us of all that Jesus has said. It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ, that we can be purveyors of peace.

We are purveyors of peace. We begin our week every Sunday with the passing of the Peace. There's a story about that I'd like to tell you. A few years ago the bishops of the Episcopal Church were joined by the Primates of Papua New Guinea and Central Africa. After participating in the Holy Eucharist, the Archbishop of Central Africa said that he was interested to see the way we in the American Church pass the Peace: as you know we say "The Peace of the Lord be always with you." He found this meaningful, but also shared with the other bishops something that happens in his country. There, he told them, the custom is to take the hand of the person next to you, to look in that person's eyes and say, "I love the face of Christ I see in you." (story from the Rev. Barbara Beam.)

"I love the face of Christ I see in you."

On this Mothers' Day, this day set aside to actively seek peace in this world, perhaps we call to mind the faces of our mothers, and our fathers, and others whose love has been a reflection of Christ's love for us. Let us thank God for them, and pray that God will also use us as icons, as windows, of God's love for others. Not just God's love for those we love but God's abiding love for those we don't know how to love.

As we exchange the Peace today, look and love the face of Christ that is looking back at you. It is in this simple act of love that everyone will know that we are Christ's disciples. In peace, we will love for one another.

Amen.