

A couple of weeks ago I saw Jennifer Ortega in a play in which 13 women and one man had written monologues titled “Expressing Motherhood.” The play made me want to do something similar today.

I have not tended to preach “Mother’s Day” sermons because they are complicated. For some people today is a day to celebrate the wonders of their mothers, and that is indeed, a beautiful thing. For others, however, it is a day complicated with feelings of neglect, regret, grief, or even mourning one’s inability to conceive and to be a mother. My own personal feelings have run these whole range of emotions.

I remember for so long wanting to conceive, and how awful it was to sit in the doctor’s office with all these pregnant women around. I remember seeing women in the supermarket with children who, from my viewpoint, didn’t seem to be appreciating their children very much, and thinking I would be a better mother than they. Finally, I felt the elation of holding that blessed baby girl in my arms and then the subsequent years of worry that something might go wrong; I might do something to damage her. Shortly after Tom and I married, I miscarried and I felt the pain of not being able to bear his child. And then I watched as he reoriented his great gifts of parenting, selflessly becoming one of our girls’ greatest blessings. But I also know the great joy of being a mother and sharing the lives of little human beings, watching them grow with protective eyes and ears, teaching, guiding, providing, and then painfully letting go so that they could become fully their own persons.

And finally, I have experienced the somewhat complicated mother/daughter relationship that holds impossible expectations and negotiates the reality of being loved and loving the person who gave you life and through whose love, devotion, and perseverance your life was sustained.

Today’s scriptures are two of my own mother’s favorites. The first one was read and preached on at her funeral service. But I didn’t like the sermon very much. What I heard was that “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding” meant for one to be devoid of initiative and to not trust your own thought processes.

My mother certainly trusted God with a heart that acknowledged there was more than meets our human understanding; but she was smart and creative and energetic and tried her best to use her intellect and understanding for the good of her family and the world. I didn’t always agree with her understanding, but she moved through the world with conviction and courage, and that is to be admired. And I would do well to remember that trust in God brings me to a state of humility where I listen to God’s call, accept God’s silence, and trust that there is a bigger picture of which I am only one small part.

My mother’s life was a hard one, so trust was the way she found strength to put one foot in front of the other and make it through another day. Many young mothers are in a similar situation. I watch them with great admiration. The poverty of the Great Depression in which my mother grew up is now the poverty of the Great Recession where we see mothers and fathers desperate to put food on their families’ tables.

My mother believed that God would “judge” her based on how her children and grandchildren turned out. I think this was a heavy burden. Though her children, I think, turned out pretty well, she worried that she might not have taught us enough of the “right way.” As many of you already know, she never completely accepted that God wanted women in the ministry. Near

the end of her life when I spent nine days with her at the hospital in Nashville, she delighted in telling her relatives when they called that I could have been a great nurse. I was the only daughter who wasn't fazed by the physical and often unpleasant realities of her illness, and I learned how to turn her, bathe her, change the bed linens while she was in it, anything that would give her a degree of comfort. Yet, when I had to leave, she gave me her ultimate blessing: "Tom needs you and your congregation needs you." I will hold onto that blessing the rest of my life.

It isn't easy when the people from whom you most want affirmation have a different value system than your one. It requires a transcendent and unconditional love that is stronger than specifics of right and wrong, a love that values the relationship above all else. Though I have tried very hard to not impose my beliefs on my daughters, they often would intuit when I would do or believe things different. One Christmas, Allison, gave me this plaque: "My mother is a travel agent for guilt trips." Similarly, she gave Tom this one: "A father is someone who has pictures in his wallet, where his money used to be."

There are not too many stories about mothers in the Bible. Tom and I were recalling them. God heard Hagar's weeping for Ismael and protected them. Hannah prayed for a child and promised to give him to the Lord's service. She was given a son but not able to raise him to maturity because she kept her promise.

Ruth and Naomi are wonderful examples of a daughter's love for her mother-in-law. "Whether thou goest, I will go, whether thou dwellest, I will dwell, your God shall be my God and your people, my people." We think of these words for weddings, but they were actually words of a daughter to her mother-in-law.

I remember the widow who gave Elijah bread even though she thought she had only enough to give her son one last meal; yet, God provided for their lives.

On the cross Jesus relinquished his mother by telling her, "Woman, behold your son (referring to the beloved disciple)" and then telling the beloved disciple, "Son, behold your mother." He knew that a woman alone in that time and place was in great peril. Then there's this verse from II Timothy that describes Timothy's grandmother Lois and mother Eunice teaching him the Word of God.

I am grateful that my mother taught me the Word even if I have interpreted it differently at times. I would not be here today had she not done so. And I am grateful for many other things she taught me. She modeled living on the edge with grace, which I remembered intuitively when for five years I raised the girls alone. She taught me the creativity of sewing and crafts which feeds my soul even today. And even though she had strict ideas about divorce, when Tom came along, she recognized a good thing when she saw it.

She never placed material things over relationships. If someone needed her, and she had her hair in curlers, she didn't care, she went out to meet the need. If someone came to her and her house was not clean, she never refused their entrance.

Today I am grateful for her and for all mothers and for those who give the gifts of motherhood even if they have not physically given birth, **all** mothers who work so hard, love so unconditionally, bear such burdens for their families, and teach the word of God to their children so that they may grow and thrive and be something beautiful to God.