

May 11, 2023

## MOTHER'S DAY BRINGS BOTH JOY AND HEARTACHE

Of all the secular holidays, Mother's Day may evoke the most emotion. It is observed in more than 40 countries, some with centuries-old traditions. In our country, it began as a religious observance in the early 20th century, and is now commonly celebrated other ways as a heartwarming occasion for mothers and children. But Mother's Day can also stir pain, angst, grief, regret, and sorrow.

Let's think about the woman yearning for children she never had; or grieving a child who died in the womb, or later on. Or someone whose mother recently died, or parented poorly, or is emotionally distant. Or the woman who regrets an abortion, is estranged from her child, or gave one up for adoption. For all these reasons and more, Mother's Day can be hard. Rest assured, our all-knowing God knows that.

He saw to it that the Bible included many painful motherhood scenarios, along with evidence of his grace to endure them. The first mother mentioned there is Eve, whose sin alongside her husband's incurred the curse of pain in childbirth. Yet that considerable pain was surely dwarfed for Eve by the pain of her older son killing her younger one (Genesis).

Later we see the story of Sarah, disappointed by childlessness for decades. In her impatience for God to fulfill his promise of a son, she coerced her servant Hagar into bearing her husband Abraham's child for them, then later cast mother and child out, causing heartache for all concerned (Genesis).

Jacob's wife Leah hoped that motherhood would inspire her husband to love her, to no avail. His favored wife Rachel longed to conceive, had no children for years, then died giving birth to Benjamin (Genesis).

Moses' mother gave birth to him during an Egyptian decree that all newborn Hebrew males be killed by the midwives, so she hid him, then devised a way to surrender him into the care of Pharaoh's wife to save his life (Exodus).

Hannah suffered infertility for years, made more painful by the gibes of her fertile rival Peninnah. In her anguish, Hannah continued praying for a child, vowing that she would "give him to the Lord for all the days of his life." When that long-awaited child finally arrived, Hannah kept her promise, praising God's sovereignty even as she surrendered young Samuel to the Lord's service at the Temple (1 Samuel).

Bathsheba became a mother through unsought adultery with King David, and their infant son died (2 Samuel).

There is much heartache in each of these mother's stories, and much grace, too. This includes the story of Mary, mother of Jesus.

It began with a supernatural conception before marriage, the scandal of which surely followed Mary the rest of her life. When Jesus was just eight days old, the prophet Simeon told Mary that as Jesus fulfilled his redemptive mission, "a sword will pierce your own soul, too." Indeed, motherhood for Mary included standing helplessly at the foot of her beloved son's cross, as He suffered humiliation, torture, and death to save her and all who believe in Him.

Fully aware of her suffering joined to his, Jesus lovingly provided for his mother from the cross, consigning her to his disciple John's care. Likewise, Jesus invites us to join our motherhood-related suffering to his suffering, so He can lovingly provide comfort and healing to us.

So, if Mother's Day stirs any brokenness in you, take it to God in honest prayer. He will be there for you, with comfort and healing: "The

Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit"; "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (Psalm 34:18; 147:3).

And as we celebrate the joys of Mother's Day, may we also be mindful of those who struggle with it. If you know one, extend Jesus' love to them in some way this week. By your simple acknowledgement, loving prayer, or comforting word, they will know that God has kept count of their tossings, and has put their tears in his bottle (Psalm 56:7-8).

With love in the Lord,  
The Rev. Christine Maddux