

In The Name Of God, Father, Son, And Holy Spirit, Mother Of Us All

As you've noticed by now, the title of this article is how I start my sermons each week. Perhaps this caught you off guard at first, or had you wondering just what kind of preacher I would turn out to be. The truth is that many of us are not used to hearing God referred to as Mother, especially when we have come to faith relying on the words of creeds and the Lord's Prayer, which both refer to God as "our Father."

I hope that at this point in our relationship you have come to realize that I do not use this invocation of God at the outset of my sermons as a way to push an agenda, or to shock and surprise, nor do I use this reference to God as Mother to somehow undermine the idea of God as our Father. When I invoke the name of God in this way, I do so as a part of a long tradition of people of faith who have used a wide range of language to more faithfully and fully describe the nature of God.

While we might look at the translation of the Bible that we have today and think that only masculine words are used for God, this is not the case. In the original Hebrew of the Old Testament there are numerous instances where God is referred to using uniquely female descriptors. When Moses is with God on the mountaintop ready to receive the Ten Commandments in Exodus 34:6, God describes Godself as "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." The Hebrew word for "merciful" is in fact the same as the word for "womb"—what God is telling us is that God's love for us is as one who has carried and given birth to us. Even before that we read in Genesis 1:27 that male and female were both made in God's image, that both reflect the nature of God.

Just as the Bible is filled with rich imagery of God as our father, so too is it filled with imagery of God as our mother. Hosea 11:3-4, Hosea 13:8, Deuteronomy 32:11-12, Deuteronomy 32:18, Isaiah 49:15, Isaiah 42:14, Matthew 23:37, and list continues...in these passages we have beautiful descriptions of God as a mother bear, a woman in labor, a nursing mother, a mother hen.

The truth, ultimately, is that all of this language is just that—words. This language helps us grasp at the full reality of God's unknowable and impossible to understand nature, helps us make an attempt at wrapping our heads around the divine. God does not fit in the categories that our human minds understand—male, female, human. God is bigger than it all. The truth of God's vastness is one that we will only know when we are made one with God upon our own resurrection—until then we use imperfect language to describe what is only a part of the majesty of our Lord. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:12: "Now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

Only using male language for God misses part of the truth of who God is. Only using female language for God does the same. The best we can do with all of this is to trust that God is bigger than our understanding, is bigger than the boxes we have tried to capture God within, and is capable of more than we could ever imagine. Thanks be to God.

In peace, Pastor Marissa