I believe we should encourage Mothering – in all souls – especially our own. Last Sunday I encouraged Doubting – being less certain about our beliefs and views than usual – Doubting as a way to ensure our continued growth in understanding and in caring connection with the world and as a way to at least not divide ourselves off from others. Psychologically and habitually, that’s not easy. We are taught to debate to win, not learn and resolve. But having some winners mean all being losers in a community setting. As to how Doubters conduct themselves, maybe it’s just to learn to ask questions, at least to slow our reactivity down and at best to learn stuff we don’t yet know.

Similarly, I would hypothesize that we are more likely to make life better for ourselves and others if our behavior toward life is mothering. Some say that no good deed goes unpunished – and some say every action that is helpful to some is hurtful to others. Mothering says NO to that belief. There are ways of pure blessing, pure benefit for all earthkind.

I use the word “Mothering” on this Mothers’ Day because, as is pretty universally experienced and documented, every person’s mother is different – different in nature, in nurture, in culture - even between siblings - because people change with experience and time, growing, or sometimes diminishing, in spirit. Even parents change. Sometimes a mother is even a man.

There are many truisms about the ideal mother and mothering. Truism don’t feel true to everybody.
So, what is the ideal of mothering? Is it the “good enough mothering” according to psychologist Bruno Bettelheim? Is it the “tiger mothering” according to Yale professor and Chinese-American mom Amy Chua? Is it mothering defined by a male voice? Is it mothering defined by a female voice? Is it mothering defined by a different voice? Is it mothering defined by Myers-Briggs personality types? Is it the mothering of compassion or of judgment, of mental health or of mental ill?

I would think that at every decision point in relationship between mothers and children, each of us who is mothering would be likely to make a somewhat different decision about how to do it – because we each act out of differing influences of nature and nurture.

In older cultures – village-based or camp-based - every child had numerous watchers and care-givers, male and female – all mothering. Yes, you knew your actual mother, and maybe your actual father. But they and their influence were not isolated in time or space or activity from the numerous others you would see as you woke on the crowded sleeping-floor, or ate with numerous hands feeding you, or toddled and danced around the morning gossip circle, or were bathed in a crowd at the stream, or went out in the group to gather eggs or fish or fruit.

Last Sunday I told of a report about the woman in the Ugandan town who stayed every night with the town’s children, gathered in fear of the marauding rebel armies. Why did she leave her husband and her own children a few blocks away to do this? Was it simply a given in her village up-bringing? Was it the daily message of the gospel or the grace of Sunday communion? Was it a mother’s breaking heart knowing that if all children aren’t comforted neither will hers be comforted?

The bottom line is, she was there, mothering. The ideal of mothering does not seem entirely unknown or unintuited or unexplored after all. Proximity, Presence, Touch, Talk, Reliability, Compassion, Altruism, Appreciation, Connection.

When I was a boy, after the school day, my friends Rob and Tucker and Chipper and Frank and Larry swarmed like a flock of locusts to each other’s home kitchens, as well as to the home kitchens of many other classmates – Butchy, Buddy, Kenny, Billy, Steve, Ray, George, Ronnie, Paul, Fraser, and even sometimes Maureen and Ellen. And always within walking distance there was a mother with snacks or a father with coins for snacks from the soda fountain in the village center.

What was the ideal mother to these children of the 1950s? The ideal, I’d say, was the universal unflappable welcomer, the provider of treats, the
knower of forest and field playgrounds and forts, the trustworthy pillar of the familiar village, the definer (and subtly, a model) of ultimate values.

They were the beautiful people. And they were all different – in intellectualism, justice activism, social life, vocation, religion, appearance, personality.

And they were similar – always acting as if expecting our arrival, always welcoming and trusting yet always guardians, always knowing our nicknames (and sticking with old ones for a heartwarmingly long time), always feeding us or trusting their refrigerator to us, always asking about school and plans for the afternoon or weekend or life, and at peak moments telling us why they valued what they valued and why they did what they did.

They were our homes beyond our home, our schools beyond our school, our interests beyond our interests. None of them disciplined physically – only talked and listened, and occasionally gently but firmly terminated play for the day when play was doing more damage than good, and once in a great while expressing disappointment along with a guileless expectation that we’d do better next time now that we understood. They knew us well and believed in us. We mattered because we mattered to them.

And at a kid’s level, we knew them well and believed in them. We understood the virtue of the seventh generation Unitarian mom who made sure the Catholic kid joining their family vacation got to Mass each Sunday. We understood the joke later in our lives when it was noted that the fifth generation Unitarian mom who taught Sunday school left the kids with no knowledge of the Bible whatsoever except that the word “antidisestablishmentarianism” was the longest word in the dictionary, was not a good thing for freedom of religion, and that it was the prevailing attitude of the Bible, whatever that was. They mattered because they mattered to us.

We had what the child in each of us needs – what the growing edge in each of us needs - a village – a continuous, value-bearing system of relationship, understanding, concern and caring. You don’t find villages much anymore – unless you find people with whom to build one.

Well, that’s why you’re here – motherers and children of a village that helps us grow solid and well – like an old-fashioned barn-raising, except we’re community-raising; we’re building a mother church.

I remember those who mothered me as in the line of bodhisattvas – as Kwan Yin mother goddess buddhas – who, without ill-will or grasping or fear or deception or harm, and with seemingly boundless energy and mindfulness and compassion, cared for all us beings so that all beings could grow in consciousness and bliss.
I remember them as in the line of maiden mother Mary Nazareth in her Magnificat song of celebration – her soul magnifying the divine in all souls with a fullness of grace, of life power for comfort, joy, graciousness, and fullness of life.

I remember them as in the line of Clarissa Pinkola Estes’ archetypal strong woman goddess whose qualities poured forth the truth and strength necessary to make all of life’s matter matter.

I remember them as in the line of Greek philosopher queen Diotima, Socrate’s primary teacher. Like all motherers, She was perhaps the first person ever to teach a path of human psychological or spiritual development, perhaps like every motherer teaching the evolution of a person from the individual pleasure of specific love to the universal virtue of love-empowered beautiful deeds of caring.

The primary lesson of mothering, I judge from all this, is how to experience joy outside your own body and ego, and magnify it to vaster dimensions. Not every one learns it, it seems. But I think all souls could. And I believe the world would be much happier if perhaps 67% of all souls would.

So let me suggest we add to our list of highest salvational ambitions, not only establishing the practice of Doubt as a fundamental tool for growing in faithful understanding, but also establishing the practice of Mothering, for oneself and for all souls, as a fundamental tool for saving the world, or at least our reachable portion of it.

How to establish the practice of Mothering as your second nature?

Perhaps follow Diotima’s developmental method of starting with caring for something beautifully easy to love and thereafter expanding that caring as you learn to see the deeper essential cherishable beauty in all beings.

Perhaps follow Kwan Yin’s, maiden Marian’s, or Jungian goddess’s methods of engraining gracious-intention and caring-intention through meditation and prayer, through self-examination and discovery in dreams and memory, in reformation of beliefs and attitudes and conscience. Or perhaps by an act of will, you could just choose to henceforth be an ideally mothering person.

This Mothers’ Day, may we remember the lineage of on-going mothering that has opened us to the singing moments of our lives – realizing with thankfulness that it is the cumulative mothering voices which give meaning to the stars and which guide us in finding our life-songs in the star-songs of the night – realizing with thankfulness that we, too, can be one of those voices.
**READINGS**

**INVOCATION** (responsive) from the *Metta Sutta & Bodhisattva Vows*

May all beings live in consciousness and bliss.
May all strengthen and grow.
May our views not be narrow or fixed.
May our wills be liberated from hate and ill-wishes.
May our hearts not be ruled by craving or by fear.
May we not deceive or harm
May our spirits be free and pure.
May all beings live in consciousness and bliss.
May we strengthen and grow and be whole.
With boundless mindfulness, may we cherish all.
As a mother protects her child with her life,
so may we take care of all that live.

**MEDITATION** Adapted from *The Magnificat of Mary of Nazareth*, Luke 1

May your soul magnify your Source
and may your spirit rejoice in its providence –
for the divine serves
through blessing the service of the humble.
Surely all generations will call you blest and a blessing,
for divine grace is full in you,
and holy is its giving way,
its loving power flowing
from generation to generation
of wonder-filled people.

**READING** from *Untie the Strong Woman* by Clarissa Pinkola Estes,

In a world that is often heart-stopping in horror
and breath-taking in beauty,
but too often scraped down to the bone
by those who leak scorn with such soul-sick pride,
it is the Blessed Mother,
who is so unspeakably gracious
with brilliant inspirations that pour into us –
if we listen, if we watch for them....
In (her) view, all are lovable; all souls are accepted.
Nowhere is there found a greater exemplar, teacher, mentor...
for all our days,
and for all the people and creatures
and matters that matter.
And Diotima said to her student, young Socrates,

“Love begets virtue and beautiful works in life, Socrates. Perhaps even you can become an initiate into these mysteries of Love. At least I will try my very best to instruct you. Follow as you can:

The way to approach the Way of Love is this: Starting as young as you can, begin with loving some beautiful person, for the God of Love gives its power to those who love.

Then mount thereafter ever upwards for that beauty’s sake, as by a flight of steps. Mount from loving one beautiful person to loving two, and from two beautiful people to all beautiful people, and from beautiful people to beautiful souls, people of virtue. And from beautiful souls to all souls, because in essence all souls are alike.

And then climb on to loving beautiful pursuits and practices of virtue; and from beautiful pursuits and virtues to beautiful understandings, so that by understanding you may come at last to that perfect realization of Beauty in its essence, and know at last the perfect beauty of Love itself.

There in life and there alone, my dear Socrates, is life worth living, in being absorbed in the beauty of Love itself. When you see and love the beautiful with your mind in all things, and this gives birth to real virtue and grows virtue up in you, it will be granted you to be the friend of the divine and immortal if anyone ever is.

Love begets virtue and beautiful works in life, dear Socrates. Perhaps even you can become an initiate into its mysteries.
BENEDICTION  From Julia Ward Howe’s Mothers’ Day Address (1870)
and Karen Armstrong’s 12 Steps to a Compassionate Life

May none of us any longer be made a party
to proceedings which fill the globe with grief,
but instead be blessed in mothering,
joy-centered and sorrow-mending.
You have a sacred and commanding word
to say out of your own need and suffering,
out of your own love and joy.
May that word now be heard
and may you be a true companion
to all good and deepest yearnings,
a haven of peace in a too often angry, fearful world.
We know the ideal not beyond our reach:
be a fount of blessing,
a spring of kindness,
a stream breathing forth life’s song.
All the days of your life,
blessed be.

And Happy Mothers Day.