



At A Distance – Easter 5, Mothering Day 2020

“The Etch A Sketch”



Good Morning Saints, and welcome to our “Mothering Sunday” Liturgy today at All Saints Vancouver. Wherever you are joining us from we are grateful for your presence among us and your spiritual energy... **there**, creates our Sacred Space... **here**.

Mother’s Day is a holiday honoring motherhood that is observed in different ways and days throughout the world. The American incarnation of Mother’s Day was created by Anna Jarvis in 1908 and became an official U.S. holiday in 1914 by a proclamation signed by President Woodrow Wilson. However, historians trace celebrations of mothers and motherhood back to the ancient Greeks and Romans, who held festivals in honor of the mother goddesses Rhea and Cybele. But here, Saints, is an interesting bit of Anglican history that tells us about the evolution of today’s secular Mother’s Day from a centuries old Anglican religious celebration called “Mothering Sunday.”

The clearest modern-day precedent for Mother’s Day is an early Christian celebration from our own Anglican Church in England, a tradition known as “Mothering Sunday.” In the early Church, this celebration occurred on the fourth

Sunday in Lent and it was originally a time when Anglicans would return to their “mother church”—the main church, The Cathedral, in the vicinity of their home—for a special service. Over generations the Mothering Sunday tradition shifted from a strictly Anglican religious celebration into a secular holiday as well where children would honor their mothers by presenting them with flowers as a traditional gift. This Anglican custom of “Mothering Sunday” eventually evolved into the typical Mother’s Day holiday that we observe today.

I love and embrace the traditional Anglican idea of “Mothering Sunday” very much. For me, it differentiates the biological reality from the nurturing role. Not every mother exhibits, embraces or demonstrates “mothering” behaviors and women who demonstrate and excel at “mothering” behaviors need not necessarily be mothers biologically. This morning is traditionally the day we honor Mothers. However today here at All Saints, we want to do that and more. We want to expand the scope of our Mother’s Day celebration, to bring back “Mothering Day” ... to encompass, and celebrate the many and varied roles that strong, spirited and spiritual women have played in our lives and times. In addition to honoring the women who birthed us; we also celebrate and raise up women who mentored us and taught us academically, culturally and spiritually. We raise up the wise Elders who guided us. And we celebrate the companions, partners and friends who inspired us to simply be better human beings. And we also remember today with great fondness and respect, Mary the Mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Martha and all the Women from our Sacred Scripture stories both named and un-named. Holy Women who have inspired us throughout the ages by demonstrating “mothering,” and by teaching us to walk the Jesus Way with courage, dignity and honor. And so, Saints, on this “Mothering Day,” I offer you today’s message entitled “The Etch-A-Sketch.”

Many of you may remember the amazing little drawing toy from our childhood, still available today, by the way, called the Etch A Sketch. It was a masterfully crafted bit of left brain and right brain fusion blending engineering and art in the same amazing little toy for drawing. The Etch A Sketch was created by French inventor Andre Cassagnes in 1959.

The Etch A Sketch is actually a plotter. The inside surface of the glass screen is coated with aluminum powder, which is then scraped off by a movable stylus,

leaving a dark line on the light gray screen. The stylus is controlled by the two large knobs, one of which moves it vertically and the other horizontally. Turning both knobs simultaneously makes diagonal lines. To erase the picture, the user turns the toy upside down and shakes it. Doing this re-coats, the inside surface of the screen with aluminum powder.

For me, this is the most amazing and popular part of the Etch A Sketch...is the “Do Over.” Simply turn the toy upside down and shake it and we get to have another try at whatever we were trying to do the first time. Or we can simply change things up and try a new way if the first idea didn’t go so well. I believe this is why the Etch A Sketch is in the “Toy Hall of Fame” and has been named to the Toys of the Century List and has sold over 100 million units worldwide.

The “Do Over,” The “Mulligan,” The “Re-Boot,” “Take Two,” “Plan B” by whatever name we call it...it is the opportunity to try again and again, and again until we like what we see...until we get it right. I believe that the reason for the popularity of the little Etch A Sketch is that it is so literally and ultimately... human. We get to turn it over shake it like crazy, and start turning the dials again creating revision 2.0, 3.0 or 99.0. Re-creating the next version of ourselves: better, stronger, more loving, more “mothering.” Making mistakes is a necessary and valuable sub-set of learning, and the Etch A Sketch is the perfect representation of this. One of my favorite quotes about making mistakes and leadership is from Winston Churchill, who said “Success in life is the ability to move from one mistake to another without losing enthusiasm.”

For most of us human beings mothering is an acquired skill. A learned skill modeled by somebody in our lives that is reasonably good at it. There are those yes, who just seem to have that genetic pre-disposition to it...oozing compassion, caring, patience, wisdom, gentleness and grace in all situations. Dispensing kindness and firmness often in the same sentence wrapped always in a coating and context of love. Jesus and His Mother Mary both had it, expressing the “mothering gene” for us all to see and emulate... from the Wedding Feast of Cana, to Calvary to the Resurrection. The great lessons that Jesus left us with, The Sermon on The Mount, the Sermon on the Plain...all about love, caring, compassion, endurance, wisdom, kindness, strength. Put them all in the same box and re-name it, re-brand it... “the Mothering Box.” It is not too much of a stretch

to imagine Jesus saying, “Mother one another, as I have Mothered you.” I propose to you this morning, Saints that walking the Jesus Way is all about “mothering.” Living modeling the duality of gentleness and strength, the duality of patience and expectation, the duality of grace and passion, the duality of wisdom and spontaneity, the duality of reason and faith.

Sometimes we don’t get it right either as “motherers” or as Christians. In fact, most times we don’t get it right. Always remember though...we have the Etch A Sketch! We can try again, when our “mothering” skills fall short, when we forget how to love or be graceful or how to be kind. We just pick the red box up, shake it for all we are worth and start on the next best version of ourselves. Twisting dials, listening to and learning from those who did and continue mother us as our new creation emerges on the Etch A Sketch...better... gentler...more compassionate.

If you have never personally experienced real “mothering” for yourself, the first step is to forgive those who were supposed to show you and love you in the first place. This, Saints, is the hardest step. Ojibwe Elder Wilfred Buck wisely tell us, “We must make peace with our memories.” Unfortunately, we learn what we see, and if all we have seen pain, neglect, ignorance and hate, then we need to find a new model. Someone about whom you say when you meet them, “You know, when I grow up, I want to be like_____.” You fill in the blank. Then shake the red box for all you are worth and start twisting the dials and start re-working yourself! It is our responsibility both as Christians and a humans to learn to “mothering” as fast and as completely as we can. We must all “decide” to be good Mothers...one decision at a time, to live into the maternity of our Baptismal Promises. A quote that a friend shared with me recently, that I will never forget is this one...

“If you didn’t come from a healthy family...make sure a healthy family comes from you.”

“Success in life is the ability to move from one mistake to another without losing enthusiasm.” Saints keep shaking your red Etch A Sketch box enthusiastically. Keep twisting the dials, enthusiastically. Keep learning and mothering enthusiastically. In the blessed words of our beloved St. Benedict, “Always, we begin again!”