

“Making Womb for God”
Jeremiah 1:4-10
May 9, 2010
Mother’s Day
First Christian Church
Omaha, NE
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Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,
“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.

Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak,
for I am only a boy.” But the Lord said to me,

“Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’;
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you.
Do not be afraid of them
For I am with you to deliver you,

Says the Lord.”

Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me,
“Now I have put my words in your mouth.
See, today I appoint you over nations and over
Kingdoms.
To pluck up and to pull down,
To destroy and to overthrow,
To build and to plant.”
Jeremiah 1:4-10 NRSV

Finding what is lost – mom-sense

I have been in my house now a full year and about a month ago I couldn't find one of my mixing bowls. I looked everywhere! I couldn't remember the last time I used it; in fact, I don't even think I used it in this house (sadly, that's how often I get to cook). While I couldn't remember the last time I used the bowl, I did recall that a year ago it was my mother who lovingly unpacked my kitchen boxes and put things in place. Mom was most certainly not the last person who used this bowl, nor does she even live close by; yet I gave a quick call to her and pathetically asked, "do you know where my bowl is?" Laughing at this meager request she told me where she had stored the bowl when she unpacked – and in her very good track record of being the keeper-of-all-lost things, she knew exactly where to lead me.

For many of us, our mothers are those finders of forlorn objects. Beyond finding just our misplaced items, they also remember our childhood daydreams and hopes. It is this early string of connection we first experience with our mothers that can be thankfully transferred to other people throughout our lives. We've all experienced those moments of meeting a stranger and instantly feeling a sense of connection. How often have you said puzzlingly, "don't I know you from somewhere?" Our mothers and these select people in our lives seem to have a mom-sense about them. They can sniff out our lost items or dreams; see our true selves, while also having the know-how as to when to assert any much needed information. While my mother amazes me by her skill of always knowing where the lost sock, or misplaced car keys are, I have also been amazed by the gift of mom-sense in other people in my life. My own mother might be the keeper of my childhood daydreams; she is fortunately not the only person to lovingly mother me. We all have a variety of "mothers" in our lives who love us and speak to our hearts, reminding us to who we are.

Relational-sense

This heart-sense is a tender link into our spirits, where these people seem to see and understand a little bit of our souls. I call this a heart sense because many studies reveal the early connections we make as people are through the familiar sound and thumping of a heartbeat. The sound of a mother's heart as her child sleepily nestles close to her is the first language of love we as infants hear. The heartbeat is the closest sound while in the womb, communicating life, growth and love. With each beat comes a sense of knowing - I know your rhythm, I know your spirit, I know your mind, and I know what you are capable of.

The Shoshoni tribe understood this connection to such a degree that they allowed a period of 30 days for a new family to remain isolated, allowing this heart connection to be solidified with the mother, and developed with the father. There is a sense of simplistic, yet spiritual knowing that is communicated through this string of connection. When a newborn is placed in our arms we can't help but feel our own hearts delight in meeting God in the heart of this new child.

God-sense

This knowing heart-sense can be expanded to include not only our birth mothers, fathers, those who lovingly mother us, but also with God. Erikson's psychological stages of human development claims we're able to make these connections because from the earliest stages the one who first loved us became "an inner certainty as well as an outer predictability."¹ Isn't that the way God works? God is our inner certainty, as we then discover God's outer predictability through loving relationships with others. When we meet God in another our own hearts dance in the delight of this motherly-sort of connection. Today's scripture is not only God calling Jeremiah, who at the time was a teenager; but more importantly, it is God speaking to him from this heart-sense of a mother. I have to confess that I didn't fully understand this scripture until I journeyed with a friend through her pregnancy – where I saw how a mother knows her child in the womb, in a way no one else experiences. While we often times speak of God as our father, our holy text gently offers us another way to experience God. Understanding God in the role of a Mother is equally important as relating to God as Father. Theologian Sallie McFague claims when we expand our understanding, and therefore relationship with God to include both Father and Mother, we begin to more fully understand the larger faith questions of "agape (love), creating, and justice."²

The acts of loving, creating, and instilling fairness and justice that are embodied by men and women are thankfully as diverse as we are humans. Now, I realize that not all of us are women, nor have all the women presents experienced the power of giving birth – but what we do all have in common is "all of us, female and male, have the womb as our first home, all of us are born from and fed by our mothers. What better imagery could there be for expressing the most basic reality of existence: that we live and move and have our being in God?"³ So today I invite you to hear this scripture a little differently, and instead hear it as a mother might speak to her child. This heart-sense of knowing another person has it's beginnings in the womb, and through this scripture we hear how this sense of knowing continues past birth and into our world. As God speaks to Jeremiah God speaks of knowing him, her child, as a mother.

Speaking this language of a mother, God tells Jeremiah, before you were born, I knew you. I knew your movements, I knew your growth, I knew your spirit without even knowing your face. Before you were born I knew of your potential before even fully knowing what your talents and strengths would be. As God is calling Jeremiah, God is saying I have mothered you from the very beginning and while you may feel lost by this call, while you may not know how to do it all, or feel unprepared for the tasks ahead, I know you are capable of this. Through this love, God teaches us what it means to be people of justice – we do this through loving one another.

¹ Erikson Psychological development
html:file://E\ma\PsychologicaldevelopmentErikson's.mht

² McFague "Models of God" 101

³ 106

You would think from this gentle pool of loving support Jeremiah would be jumping right into his call. Like many call stories in the bible, God was not calling Jeremiah to an easy task, but as a proclaimer of God's justice. God was not calling Jeremiah to the pulpit or sanctuary; no, she was calling Jeremiah to the streets. God's call, like a mother's expectations are rarely easy to live out.

Challenge – Our running

As God loves and encourages us to reach this potential, we all know that not all parts of mothering are snuggly bed times and sideline cheers – nope, part of mothering is to hold your child accountable to this potential life we all have to offer. This is usually not pleasant, but often times necessary.

A few years ago I visited my mother as her first graders were leaving for the day. In the hectic frenzy of pick-up time one of her students took the liberty of distracted watchful teachers eyes to begin teasing another student. Calling out his behavior one time, a second time my mother patiently waited for him to live up to his potential. And then, he had finally pushed too far. As the teasing escalated to throwing the backpack to the ground my mother walked over to her 6-year-old student and in a manner that she had done to me many times as a child, struck the fear of God into this little one. With the flick of a single finger under his chin she gently, yet firmly raised his head to look straight into her eyes. Lowering herself to his level she calmly stated, "I asked you to stop."

God's walking

When I found myself in this same position as I child I remember many things. This woman is holding my fate in one finger. This is the gentlest strength I've ever felt. And oh my God, I have done it! She was so close I could see the reflection of my face in her eyes, but even more powerfully, I could see how I was not behaving like the person she knew I could be. While we may run from God and her call to live as her people, God patiently walks to us and gently, and firmly looks us in the eye. Jeremiah comes up with the excuse of being young, not having enough experience. We come up with a multitude of excuses as well. But God is a stalwart of motherly love. She does not call us to wander alone in our tasks; she does not call us to get lost in our excuses or own self-doubt.

Like lost keys or bowls, she finds all things that are lost. Whether you are feeling lost, or you have lost what God has called you to, she finds you to offer love, support, and lovingly firm encouragement. Like the many mothers in our lives, God reminds us that she is not leaving us. God's pool of love is always present to water new life into the world. God does this because she knows what we are capable of, and knows the very heart of who we are.

Birthing God – our birth is God's birth

God mothers us not just because she loves us, but because we have life to live, things to do, God's love to share with others. She tells Jeremiah that not only do I know you, not only am I giving you the words to speak, but I'm calling you to create more life. I'm calling you to pluck up what is strangling my people. The hurtful

ways we can treat one another crowds out God's hope for us because we're not living up to our potential that God knows we're capable of.

God says, I'm calling you to change the systems that are keeping my people from fully living. I'm calling you to make room for me by making room for one another. You are to do this in the same way I made room for you. As I knew you in the womb, you are to see one another with the same genuine loving patience. We are all mothered by God and all mothers to one another when we patiently, kindly, genuinely love one another; for to truly love someone is to know them.

As God gave us life and continues to mother us, she knows we're capable of the same thing. Meister Eckhart claims "We're all mothers of God, for God is always waiting to be born." This gift of life and inclusive love that God gives to us is the exact work she calls us to. You may not fully know what your call is, or your call may look differently than the person sitting next to you; but if you can extend God's love to all people, you too are then mothering God into our world.

God calls to us, "plant seeds of love and justice. I'm calling you to mother others." Just as God loves and nurtures us, and she finds and encourages us, God does this so we might share this with others. We are to build up and plant God's loving kin-dom. We are to share God's love with one another, therefore birthing more of God into our world.

Look around this place; it is full of mother's loving you. This heart-sense of knowing another person has its beginnings in the womb; through scripture, God speaks to us as a mother, and to be a mother in our world. Know God's love, and share that with others – isn't that what our mothers all taught us?