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Redwoods Presbyterian Church
Larkspur, California
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Luke 2:48-52; Mark 3:31-35; John 19:25b-27
“Jesus and His Mother”

Wikipedia has a fascinating article on Anna Marie Jarvis the founder of the Mother’s Day holiday in the United States. Here it is, in summary:

Anna Marie Jarvis was born in the tiny town of Webster, West Virginia on May 1, 1864. She was the daughter of Ann Maria Reeves Jarvis. The family moved to nearby Grafton, West Virginia in her childhood. She graduated from Augusta Female Seminary, now Mary Baldwin College in 1883.

Anna's mother had founded Mothers' Day Work Clubs in five cities to improve sanitary and health conditions. The Mothers' Day Work Clubs also treated wounds, fed, and clothed both Union and Confederate soldiers with neutrality.

On May 12, 1907, two years after her mother's death, Anna held a memorial to her mother and thereafter embarked upon a campaign to make "Mother's Day" a recognized holiday. She succeeded in making this nationally recognized in 1914. The International Mother's Day Shrine was established in Grafton to commemorate her accomplishment.

By the 1920s, Anna Jarvis had become soured by the commercialization of the holiday. She incorporated herself as the Mother’s Day International Association, trademarked the phrases "second Sunday in May" and "Mother's Day", and was once arrested for disturbing the peace.

She and her sister Ellsinore spent their family inheritance campaigning against what the holiday had become. Both died in poverty. According to her *New York Times* obituary, Jarvis became embittered because too many people sent their mothers a printed greeting card.

She said: “A printed card means nothing except that you are too lazy to write to the woman who has done more for you than anyone in the world. And candy! You take a box to Mother—and then eat most of it yourself. A pretty sentiment.”

Anna Marie Jarvis never married and had no children. She died in West Chester, Pennsylvania, on November 24, 1948, and was buried at West Laurel Hill Cemetery, Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania.

One gets from this story that Anna Jarvis had amazing affection and appreciation for her mother, so amazing that she wanted it represented for all time and for all mothers. Secondly, she looks at mothers from a child's perspective. That works for me because I had a mother and I can speak of my mother from my perspective. I shall not do that today. Instead, I'm going to look at mothers from Jesus' perspective, his relationship to his mother, Mary.

By the way, cards given to mothers are okay, as are other acts of love and affection.

First, a disclaimer: As a Protestant pastor I regard Mary as an extremely important human being, after all she was the earthly mother of the one we consider to be God incarnate. The "how" of incarnation is another story – a theological one.

Many Catholics and Orthodox Church adherents place Mary on a higher plane. They spiritualize her in a way we don't. One example is belief that she ascended into heaven, leaving an empty tomb behind. While not worshipping her as we would God they reverence her in ways we don't. We see her as an earthly being, living and dying like the rest of us.

She doesn't appear much in the Bible but every appearance is significant. Luke's Gospel mentions her by name 12 times, Matthew five times, Mark once by name and once simply as the mother of Jesus, and John mentions her twice but without naming her. She makes one appearance in the Acts of the Apostles. Outside of that, we don't know much about her.

Most appearances of Mary are found in the infancy narratives. There she is depicted as a young, loving mother doing what mothers universally do which is to provide a safe and loving birth for their child. Mary and her husband Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem during Mary's pregnancy and when they arrive there's no place for them in the inn so they lodge in a stable. Jesus is born there. Mary and Joseph make the best of difficult surroundings.

If Jesus were to honor his mother on Mother's Day how would he do it and would it make Anna Jarvis happy? Three stories come to mind.

The first involves the only event in Jesus' adolescent life that is recorded in the New Testament. At the age of 12 Jesus, having become separated from his parents on their return journey from the Passover celebration in Jerusalem, was found among the teachers in the temple.

Instead of sticking with his parents in the caravan home he wonders off to be with the teachers. His frantic parents return to Jerusalem after a day's journey and they look for Jesus and find him in the temple. The scriptural text proceeds in Luke 2:48-52:

“When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, ‘Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.’ He said to them, ‘Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’ But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.”

We see from this story that Jesus is a gifted child but still the best way for him to honor his parents is to be obedient to them. One of the 10 commandments states: “Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.” This is good text to read to children. Jesus got it. Anna Jarvis would appreciate him for this.

The second story is more complex. Jesus is teaching at home. Crowds are gathered around and his mother and brothers arrive. The story in Mark 3:31-35 reads: “Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, ‘Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.’ And he replied, ‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ And looking at those who sat around him, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God are my brother and sister and mother.’”

On the face of it this doesn’t sound very respectful. We know from other stories that Jesus loved his mother and he knew his mother loved him. Here he uses the incident as a teaching point. Mary had a strong self-concept and she could handle it and even appreciate the message.

The will of God for biological mothers and sisters and brothers is to be loving, caring and compassionate. It’s unfortunate that there are mothers and fathers who disdain their children. They are parents on paper but what makes them true parents is the respect and love they give to their children. This is the point Jesus is making here. Anna Jarvis would go for this.

Also, the will of God is peace for our world. Jesus blesses peacemakers. Mother’s Day was originally started after the Civil War, as a protest to war, by women who had lost their sons. Julia Ward Howe, who wrote Battle Hymn of the Republic, spearheaded the campaign and was party to a Mother’s Day Proclamation from 1870.

The Proclamation in part states: “We women of one country will be too tender of those of another country to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs. From the bosom of the devastated earth a voice goes up with our own. It says ‘Disarm, Disarm!’ ...Let them (women) solemnly take counsel with each other as

to the means whereby the great human family can live in peace, each bearing after their own time the sacred impress, not of Caesar, but of God.”

Finally, we have one of the most beautiful mother/son stories in all of scripture. Jesus is hanging on the cross and his mother is looking on. Imagine watching your son or daughter nailed on a cross before your very eyes and you can do nothing about it.

Here's the story, recorded in John 19:25b-27: "...standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home."

Jesus is dying and his first thought when he sees his mother is how she will manage after he is gone. As a pastor I see many children being the kind of models one sees here in Jesus. Helen Morita's children are wonderful in their care of Helen. Barbara Slusher's sons were her constant caring companions during her recent illness and Mark Larson's care for Klara is legendary. Anna Jarvis would be proud of all of them.

Mothers come in all guises today: biological, adoptive, foster, step, surrogate, etc. and even grand and great grand and great, great grand. Whatever the term or prefix we wish them all a Happy Mother's Day! Amen.