



MOTHER'S DAY

LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

Sunday, May 10, 2009

When Mama Was God

When mama was God

She made miracles happen
In the middle of a Houston ghetto
The center of my universe, indeed.

She walked on water
In three inch heels, matching bag
With us five kids in her footsteps.

She taught us to fear not
Night lightening, thunderstorms
Hard work, new things, good success.

When mama was God

She created not one but two
Fancy Easter dresses and sewed
Lace on my socks to match.

She hollered for me from the porch
Compelling me to come out, come out
From all of my favorite hiding places.

She held me close with strong hand
So close that I would inhale
Warm fleshy bosom heat for air.

When mama was God

She laid hands on us
So the cops wouldn't and trifling men
couldn't

Healing bad attitudes and broken hearts.

She stood her ground with white folk
Who were pure evil
Of the 60s... 80s... the new millennium.

She made a dollar hollah
On the occasions of more month than money
Without robbing anyone of anything.

When mama was God

She blessed two fish and five loaves
Or was that gov'm't cheese
And canned mystery meat?

She kept an open door policy
Always meant that somebody else
Would be sleeping on the living room floor.

She prayed for us and others
We eavesdropped listening for our name to be called
Knowing that no weapon formed against us would
prosper.

When mama was God

"Girl, you just like your mama,"
somebody said one day
when I was feeling God all over me.

By RevSisRaedorah ©

Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, Lectionary Team Commentator

Lection - Exodus 1:15-21; 2:1-10 (New Revised Standard Version)

Exodus 1:15-21

(v. 15) The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, (v. 16) “When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live.” (v. 17) But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. (v. 18) So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?” (v. 19) The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.” (v. 20) So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. (v. 21) And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.

Exodus 2:1-10

(v. 1) Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. (v. 2) The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. (v. 3) When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. (v. 4) His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him. (v. 5) The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. (v. 6) When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him, “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children,” she said. (v. 7) Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?” (v. 8) Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Yes.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. (v. 9) Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed it. (v. 10) When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, “because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.”

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

Mother’s Day is the day we commemorate the lives of the women who are anointed with the special and the mysterious something called “mothering,” which is best described as the nurturing, caring, and loving spirit of women who have molded and maintained our families and community. Mothering is not a biological thing, but a divine gift. Many women have given birth to children, but they have never been “mothers” in the full sense of the word. Whereas, there have been women who have never borne children that have been mothers to countless individuals. The old adage, “the hand that rocks the cradle, rules the world,” is a true one indeed, because it is often the hand of the mother that takes the characterless, shapeless, selfless lump of flesh called a human and molds it into a person, citizen, and legacy.

Mothering has no color, no age, no ethnic or national origin, nor geographic preference. Instead, mothering is a gift that is rarely convenient for the bearer of the gift, for the shoulders of a mother carries the burden of the nature and nurture of the world, but for the recipient it is absolutely necessary. Much like the gift of the sun, it is the mother that warms, sustains, and gives life. Every soul that does not receive the life-giving rays of a mother remains as lifeless and

cold as the earth does without the sun. For a God-ordained “mother,” as Elizabeth Mitchell Clemmon said in her eulogy of her mother, the late Reverend Dr. Ella Pearson Mitchell, is one whose ambition outruns and exceeds the ambition one has for one’s self.”

II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: Exodus 1:15-21; 2:1-10

Part One: The Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter

Before I knew God, I knew my mother. I say this not to be trite, but because of the miraculous power of my mother’s love it only seemed logical and natural to believe in the reality of God. For in my mind, only God could create someone as awesome as a mother. Although I came from a close-knit two-parent home, and am often seen as a “Daddy’s Girl,” it was my mother and her love that was the center of my life and our home. Much like the aroma of the of sweet potato pies and German chocolate cakes she was known for, she scented our home with the fragrance of her loving affection, strength of character, and strong support. Although my father was the chief disciplinarian and breadwinner, she was the wind beneath our wings, the wiper of our tears, the healer of our wounds, and the corrector of our childhood mistakes. Not only was she a mother to my brothers, sister and me, but she was also a midwife to other women trying to discern their way in mothering and an other-mother to an extended family of my schoolmates, church folk, and youth within my community.

Part Two: Biblical Commentary

The opening two chapters of Exodus introduce us to the significance of mothering. Although regarded as mere remnants of a larger story of liberation or the back story to a greater saga, the text makes clear, to use womanist sociologist Cheryl Townsend Gilkes’ words, “that if it wasn’t for the women” there would be no exodus, no Moses, no liberation of the Children of Israel of which to speak.¹ It was the guidance of an entire village of maternal women—mothering women such as midwives, birth mothers, sisters, and other-mothers—that gave rise to the greatest liberation movement known to human history. Biblical scholars tell us that the mothering illustrated within the text profiles three characteristics of motherhood: women acting in rebellion (1:17), without explicit authority (2:7; 10), or within an exclusively female network (1:15-21; 2:1-10).² In this respect, this passage reveals that successful mothering – that is, mothering that liberates not only individuals and families but also extended communities and societies—is an act of intervention upon the course of civilization.

The initial act of liberating motherhood began with the refusal of the midwives Shiprah and Puah to carry out Pharaoh’s unjust order to murder Israelite boys (1:15-19). The covering and shielding of the infant Moses by his mother was an outlaw act against Pharaoh’s rulings (2:1-3) which could be deemed the second act of liberating motherhood. The strategic actions plotted and improvised by Moses’ sister (2:7) represent the third act of liberating motherhood. This is also evident in the decisive actions on the part of Pharaoh’s daughter that brought about the unspoken reunion of mother and child (2:5-6) as the last act of liberating motherhood. As these three classic acts reveal, it takes a village of mothers and mothering to raise a child and a civilization!

Celebration

There is an old adage, “Because God couldn’t be everywhere, God created mothers.” But those of us who have been loved by the divine gift of a mother know, because we have mothers we are certain of the omnipresence of God, for the love of a God-fearing woman is an extension of God’s love. So, on this day we honor those mothers who so feared and loved God that they stood up to the death-dealing forces of this world to secure places for life to grow and for many of us to overcome negative life circumstances so that we could make positive life choices. We celebrate those mothers who sowed into each of us the embryo of dreams and hopes. We celebrate those modern-day midwives among us, who helped us with the pain of achieving and reaching our goals. We celebrate those women who, like Moses’ mother, have wrapped us in the ark of their love and support and pitched our lives with Godly principles and character that enable us to navigate and stay afloat the tumultuous tides of life. We celebrate those maternal sisters like Miriam, when they could not hold us personally their guiding eyes, teachings, prayers, and principles guided us through the reeds of life until we landed safely at the various stages of our life adventures. We celebrate adopted mothers who, like Pharaoh’s daughter, met us at the point of need, whether as teenagers, college students, young adults, professionals, wives, husbands, fathers, and mothers in our own right, and pulled us out of the death-dealing waters of life. And we thank God that in women was found the most sacred and special vessel, mothers, within whom and by whose hand God entrusted the Savior of the world to be cradled, crafted, and formed.

III. Descriptive Details

The descriptive details of this passage include:

Sights: A baby boy placed in a basket flowing in a stream and then found in a thicket of reeds on a riverbank (v. 2:3); a woman nursing a child (v. 2:7); a woman drawing a child out of water and holding him up to be named (v. 2:10);

Smells: The smell of a warm, sweet, milky, baby (v. 2:1-10); and

Sounds: Birth pains (v. 2:2), crying babies (v. 1:15-21; 2:1-3); rushing waters; sounds of a cooing, suckling child (v. 2:7-9).

Notes

1. See, Gilkes, Cheryl Townsend. If It Wasn't for the Women...: Black Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000.
2. Setel, Drorah O'Donnell. “Exodus.” The Women’s Bible Commentary. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, Eds. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992. p. 29