

## **“Architects of Our Lives - a Mother’s Day Sermon”**

*by Rev. “Twinkle” Marie Manning*

Mother’s Day is one of the most difficult sermons for ministers to prepare and deliver. Especially in liberal religious traditions.

It is virtually impossible for us to create a message that is comfortable for everyone... Let alone meets everyone’s needs... Let alone honors each person’s relationship with their maternal figures.

Or, for women, their relationship with themselves as mothers or women who did not or could not have children.

Mother’s Day is wrought with emotions, expectations, disappointments, celebrations and gratitude. Depending on where one is on their journey as mothers or with their mother.

And, by journeys, I am referring to the journeys of our hearts and minds.

If there is disharmony in families, any holiday can elicit heart aches.

Yet, Mother’s Day...

Some how Mother’s Day comes with some of the sharpest edges to it.

I wonder if it is because there is no way around it.

Meaning, at Christmastime or Thanksgiving, if certain family members are not present, there are all manner of excuses we can make out loud and within the saddest aspects of our hearts.

People are busy after all.

And, with the ever widening configurations of blended and expanded families, there are varied obligations to be negotiated with everyone’s calendars.

Even within families where there are no estrangements, celebrating holidays such as Christmas a few weeks before or after has become commonplace among many families. It is often less about who is the priority, and more about whose turn it is.

Yet, on Mother's Day, well that is a much narrower focus.

Or, at least once-upon-a-time it was.

Once upon a time top billing was quite different.  
And, even, orderly.

In the small province I grew up in, most everyone (children and husbands) celebrated their mother first thing in the morning and throughout the entire day.

We would go to church where the minister or priest would cite all the appropriate Bible texts about Honoring one's mother; following her instructions; noting that she is wise and caring and praiseworthy.

Further doting continued afterwards as adult children would call their mother's to wish them Happy Mother's Day!

Mothers would have received their cards in the preceding days. Flowers likely delivered on Friday, to commence the celebration. And, if they all lived on the Island, or close enough for a visit, families would gather at the Eldest woman's home. Typically the Grandmother or even Great grandmother. Where all Mothers present exchanged Happy Greetings as they were showered with love from their children of all ages as well as from the men present.

I'm not kidding!  
This was the way it was!! :)

Granted, my father's mother lived in Boston - back then a more than 14 hour trip to visit. So, after church, my parents both chatted her up on the phone.

And - for full transparency - my mother and Nana **Did Not** get along!

Yet, on Mother's Day, they set aside any discontent with each other, and both wished the other a Happy Mother's Day.

And, they meant it!  
They really meant it!!

When I was old enough to notice the tension between my mother and Nana, I asked her (my Mom) specifically if she really meant “Happy Mother’s Day.”

She said she did. That Nana was Dad’s mother, and no matter what her relationship was like with Nana, that without Nana, Dad would never have been born.

And, more than that, she said Dad loved his mother, so, out of respect and love for both of them, she truly hoped that Nana had a Happy Mother's Day.

Next, I asked her if she really loved Nana. She said she did. Without question. She didn’t *like* her alot of the time. But the love she felt for her was genuine.

I was amazed then.  
I am amazed to this day as I reflect on that example.

An example that I wish more families adopted.

Yet, beyond pleasantries, and really perhaps sometimes for some that is all it ever was, was an established etiquette that fostered a “pleasantry” atmosphere.

Yet, beyond that, more than that ...and I know of no one of that era, on that Island, that would have referred to it as this...  
Yet, it was absolutely rooted a belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

For some families, and their mothers and grandmothers, Mother’s Day is still a quintessential holiday.

Yet, for many if not most, Mother's Day has devolved into a day that seems to harvest pain even as it opens up old wounds.

We live in an era when our population is seeking to heal from what are termed as "The Mother Wound" and "Maternal Alienation." In equally devastating proportions these conditions wreak havoc on individuals and families.

The Mother Wound is a type of attachment trauma that occurs when a child's emotional needs are not met by their mother or mother figure.

It refers to the emotional pain and trauma that can arise from a lack of sufficient love, support, or emotional connection from a mother figure, potentially leading to issues with attachment, self-worth, and relationships.

While neglect or abuse can contribute, it can also stem from "under-mothering," where a child receives enough physical care to survive but not enough emotional support to *thrive*.

Sometimes this occurs when a young child or teen's mother dies, or if she is ill for an extended period and unable to care for her child.

And, conversely, it can inadvertently occur, if a child feels "over-mothered," where a child feels they do not have room to ever make their own decisions or experience life outside their Mother's sphere of influence.

The Mother Wound also manifests in situations where mothers employ narcissistic tendencies.

They model lack of empathy, a grandiose sense of self-importance, an unrelenting need for attention and admiration, and/or have an extreme lack of boundaries.

They often use manipulation and control, prioritize their own needs and desires at the cruel expense of their child.

And, in extreme cases, demonstrate exploitative behaviors.

The Mother Wound can be felt as a loss or lack of adequate mothering.

It can instill deeply rooted beliefs that make a child feel unloved, abandoned, unworthy of care, and even fearful of expressing themselves.

Maternal Alienation, a form of Parental Alienation Syndrome, can occur when one parent strategically manipulates the child's affection for the other parent by embarking upon a campaign of denigration of the other parent.

Most often seen during divorces and custody disputes, the result is a drastic negative shift in how the child identifies with the now alienated parent.

This can have lifelong detrimental effects on the parent-child relationship.

According to the Journal of American Child and Adolescent Psychiatry: In the United States and Canada, an estimated 22 million adults are targets of parental alienation behaviors - that's over 30% of parents!

With at least 10 Million experiencing what they perceive as severe alienation from their children.

Studies reveal that geographical distance from the alienator and more time with the rejected parent is a powerful factor in reconciliation.

Yet, that is not always possible, especially if the alienator has custody of the children.

Often this kind of negative mental health pattern can only be healed once the child has matured into adulthood.

And, by "matured," that is to say, that they have been able to overcome a range of negative psychological effects, including anxiety, depression, behavioral problems, and difficulty forming, and keeping, healthy relationship.

A large portion of these children will treat the alienated parent with similar abusive tendencies that were modeled by the alienator parent.

Which could include emotional and verbal abuse, as well as completely shutting the alienated parent out of their lives.

The parent who is alienated may experience emotional distress, profound sadness, feelings of helplessness, deep grief, frustration, isolation, imposter syndrome - stemming from feelings of inadequacy and rejection, because of the consequential difficulty of maintaining a healthy relationship - and sometimes a relationship of any kind - with their child.

The potential of healing this alienation syndrome, for parent and child, is possible. Yet it takes patience, time, positive boundaries, and a willingness to participate in the healing process.

While the majority of North Americans experience either the Mother Wound or Parental Alienation and sometimes both, neither are yet recognized as a specific diagnosis in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

Even so, skilled therapists take care to note the emotional impacts and potential consequences of each as they can be a helpful framework for understanding and addressing the challenges that may arise.

Cognizant therapists can help explore the experiences that led to these syndromes, help them process the emotions, help them learn to discern truth from fiction in regards to the parent-child relationship, and, help them develop healthier coping mechanisms.

Attachment Theory suggests that early parent-child relationships shape how individuals form relationships throughout their lives.

If those early childhood experiences modeled adverse ways of being in relationship, modeled adverse ways of coping with life's stresses, disappointments, anger, and disharmonies:

It is absolutely up to us as adults (Adults of any and every age) to mindfully assess the damage, and assiduously repair any harm that was done; take to task reshaping negative patterns inherited as a result, and to recreate more positively how we are in the world.

Healing these impacts not just the parent-child relationship, it positively impacts whole families. And, all our relationships.

It can create a pathway to generational healing. And, as with all psychological health improvements, healing the Mother Wound and Paternal Alienation can enhance all aspects of one's life.

When one feels secure in their most-intimate relationships, and the parent-child relationship psychologically and physiologically is at the core of our very roots. Repairing it will strengthen us, unquestionably.

As we explored earlier this year in our service entitled, "Just Breathe" - our emotions have a significant impact on our physiology, triggering a cascade of physiological responses through the autonomic nervous system, affecting heart rate, breathing, blood flow, and more.

When we heal our familial wounds, that wandering Vagus nerve receives the message of this healing and sends outward and *out word* to the rest of our nervous system.

When we are able to release fear, anger, anxiousness and transform toward feelings of happiness, security and trust, our whole lives change.

Because., how we show up in our lives changes.

We embody a more relaxed nature.

We are more readily able to access feelings of gratitude and of peace.

I will pause to say, that I understand that not all relationships are healable.

That sometimes, the abuse was such, that it is even unsafe to pursue mending relationships. In such cases, your safety must be the priority!

Yet, this is rare.

In most instances, it is habit, fear of rejection, fear of being wrong, or pride that prevents us from taking the necessary steps to heal our parent-child relationships.

Sometimes, parent or child has died, and as such it feels like there is no recourse towards healing.

I would like to suggest that this isn't so.

That, especially if you've lost a parent or child and you find that you are experiencing feelings of regret about your relationship as it was while they were alive, that you can take conscious steps to heal.

This is true as well if your parent or child are still alive, yet remain unwilling to engage in the work of healing.

Based on our interconnectedness, the sacredness you create by healing your own heart, can only have positive impacts that ripple out beyond and in ways we may never fully know in our lifetimes.

We are separate from our parents;  
We are separate from our children;  
Yet we are interconnected;  
This is the paradox.

We can use it as a block,  
Or we can use it as a bridge  
that transforms our lives.

In Nancy Friday's 1977 book *My Mother/My Self*, she taught a world of broken-hearted women that the greatest gift a good mother can give remains *unquestioning love* planted deep in the first years of life.

So deep, and unassailable, that the tiny child, once grown, is never held back by the fear of losing that love. The love of their mother. Nor, the love of others they are in relationship with.

In Hope Edelman's 1995 book *Motherless Daughters*, she groundbreakingly relays the implications the loss of one's mother in childhood, and with it the loss of primary emotional support and a viable role model, has for one's developing identity. And, in her 2006 *Motherless Mothers*, she dives deep into the long-term effects of early mother loss on women and how it impacts their relationships with their own children.

Many women with estranged relationships with their mothers found resemblance of themselves in the pages of these books. And, as a result, did not feel so alone.

Our Thought for Contemplation for this service is from the words of American writer, activist, and editor, Sarah Josepha Hale, born in 1788. She said,  
*"There is no influence so powerful as that of the mother."*

For good or for ill, there is a lot of truth in her words.

Mothers are the Architects of our lives.  
So are we.  
So are we!  
We can build on a solid foundation, or choose to repair a faulty one, depending on which we inherited.

Maya Angelou, who eventually healed her relationship with her own mother, affirmed that,  
*"A mother's love liberates."*

This is so so true! And, true of a father's love too!

So, to the extent that you can, seek to heal those parent-child relationships.

Reach out - parent or child - reach out!

If you find that is simply not attainable, then I turn you towards the wisdom of Fred Rogers and his mother as he reported:

*“When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’”*

This, too, is so true! Seek them out!

Lastly, for those of you for whom this day is truly a source of happiness... For those of you who have wonderful mother-child, and parent-child relationships.... You are so very blessed!!

Cherish every single moment you have with that shared loving relationship.

Celebrate with every ounce of your heart! May your joy be contagious and ripple out to all around you.

So often we find ourselves dimming our own light because others do not have that same kind of light.

Remember that the sacredness of the love we create together, can hold your joy alongside another's sorrow.

Let your light shine. The world needs more light. Embrace yours and let everyone see your abundant joy!

Today, after all, is for you.

Happy Mother's Day!!