

Gracious God, May these words be your words of grace. Amen

Mona Hilton was a beauty and all the men in the county wanted to marry her. But, if they got anywhere close to kissing her, out came the horse whip. She married and had 6 children. As a midwife, she delivered half the babies in town. During the depression, she always left an empty space at the table just in case there was someone who stopped by who was hungry. She made the best home made biscuits ever, sewed until her fingers grew tired and made coffee strong enough to make a spoon stand. She handed her stubborn, strict, strong, generous, industrious spirit onto her daughter.

Geraldine, her daughter, was a southern woman to the bone. She worked her way through college, became a teacher in a coal mining town. She could whip those boys into shape with her charm and strong jaw. She later became the one of first women mathematicians at NASA. She fell in love with a sailor who went off to war and never came back. Later in life she did marry. AS a southern woman, she made sure she had on her girdle, pearls, and lipstick when she left the house, even when she was just going to the grocery store. And when she smiled, the whole world lit up! Tough, stubborn, full of humor, she brought her daughters up to be tough, and always speaking their mind. These 2 women were my grandmother and mother. They were something else. On this day we each remember our mothers.

In the Old Testament we hear about women like Eve, who questioned even paradise and searched for knowledge, always pushing boundaries. She sadly, paid for it. Like Eve, many struggle to understand our children and at the same time are willing to engage in the risky business of motherhood. We also see women like Sarah who lived with the pain of infertility who laughed at her surprise of pregnancy. We see women who were flawed, torn, sometimes jealous, and do painful things...and yet God sees beauty and grace in them and forgives them....AND BLESSES them. We see God reflected in their imperfect lives.

Even Mary, the mother of Jesus was complicated. She was one bold woman. Mary was willing to be ostracized and risk it all to give birth to the son of God. She was a rebel as she joyously recognized that what she did would change the world. BUT, even Mary wasn't perfection. She and Joseph did not even make a birth plan! They lost Jesus once on a trip home from the temple. When he was grown, she embarrassed him at a party, was pushy....She worried about the choices he made....and once came to bring him home. BUT, you know, when he died on the cross, she stood at the base of the cross...she was immovable...and she watched him suffer and die.

Jesus during his ministry expanded what it meant to be family. For him, family is bigger than biology. Family is about how we care for one another with great compassion and tenderness. We always hear that "It takes a village". This is true.

We as mothers, we as parents, realize that parenting can be the most challenging and rewarding thing we do. But, we cannot do it alone. There are times when we are going a million miles an hour and we pray for an extra set of hands. We look at our children and we give thanks and know we are blessed. There are times when we develop a lump in our throat because we are so proud or so touched by the amazing people our children are becoming. We don't want to admit it that we gag when our child throws up...that we yell too much...that we get tired...we shake our heads as we look at our check book...our hearts are so vulnerable...BUT when we hear our children sing in the back seat of the car it brings tears to our eyes. Our children make us bold and fierce. We certainly can relate to all the Eve's, Sarah's, and Mary's in our lives and we are thankful.

In the book of Hosea we hear a story about a prophet who is mandated to marry Gomer – a prostitute, probably a cultic prostitute. Their children are named awful names - bad enough to give any child low self esteem and to be bullied on the playground. And then Gomer steps out on the family. Hosea is beside himself. This story is really about how God feels about Israel's unfaithfulness. BUT, hear these words. (Hosea 11:1 3 – 4) *When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. – It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them.*

In this story we hear about 2 mothers. The second mother is God. God who teaches us to walk – sitting on the edge of her seat, hoping we will not fall. When we wobble, she wants to catch us, but knows we must learn to stand on our own 2 feet. She heals us like a mother who puts damp wash clothes on our foreheads in the middle of the night when we have a fever. God, as a mother, guides us with love. God as a mother feeds us with grace, hope and love that will not let us go.

God as mother lets us know that family is beyond any limited definition that we can give. And as we know, families come in all configurations and forms these days. - THANKS BE TO GOD! God, as a mother to us all gives us the values of expansive love that draws a circle that includes everyone. We are each called to be spiritual mothers and fathers for children around us. We are called to be fierce, BOLD, and compassionate for all God's children – making sure they are fed, loved, held, named, SEEN, and cared for.

Family IS more than biology. It is about God's love that links us together as one.