

Sixth Sunday of Easter - May 10, 2026

Mother's Day

- Acts 17:22-31 - Psalm 66:8-20 - 1 Peter 3:13-22 - John 14:15-21

“Earthly and Heavenly Advocates”

1. Growing up, we have many people who play parental roles in our lives
 - a. I have shared with you before that my dad was a teacher all his career, over 60 years.
 - i. He taught in public schools: elementary, high school and college.
 - ii. So it's not surprising that education had a big role in our family.
 - iii. Mom and dad were set on us getting a good education and going to college.
 - b. As they say, our parents are our first teachers, and my first “home room teacher” was my mom, who raised us at home while dad was teaching the older children of other families in school.
 - i. Mom was the kind of mom who was involved in most aspects of our lives when we were very little, but she understood that at some point she had to do a hand off of responsibility when it came time for us kids to go to school full time.
 - ii. I am sure that wasn't an easy thing for her to do, to let us go out into the world (albeit for a few hours) and be out of reach, out of her immediate physical presence
 - iii. But she had to trust that God was with us, and she had to trust the education system to which my dad was dedicating his life
 - iv. So in preparation for going to first grade, I remember clearly what mom said to me: that my teacher would be my second mother (as it happens I didn't have a male teacher until junior high).
 - c. To be clear, mom was delegating not just the education part of raising me (as you'd expect from a teacher) but by saying she was also my “second mom” my mom was given her permission to disciple me.
 - i. So it was both a comforting and a clarifying image:
 - ii. my teacher is my second mom – which means she will love me and teach me.
 - iii. And also, don't get out of line because I'll get it both at school and at home.
2. In our Bible passages for today, we eavesdrop on a crucial moment in the relationship between Jesus and his disciples, a moment of transition, of a hand off

if you would, as Jesus is preparing not just for his death, and his eventual departure following his resurrection

- a. When it comes to the disciples and those who followed Jesus, they had not yet thought about the question of what would happen when Jesus wasn't around, after his resurrection
- b. Jesus himself addresses it directly by saying: there will be hand off
 - i. When I am not here, God will send you an Advocate in my place
 - ii. The one who will guide you will be what we've come to call the Holy Spirit
 - iii. The word translated Advocate in our passage can also be translated Comforter, or Helper. As Professor Yung S. Kim writes: the Spirit's "primary function is to safeguard and sustain the believing community, enabling it to persevere and bear witness to God's love-driven mission in the face of adversity."
 - iv. Think of it like the mother-to-teacher hand-off at the door of a first grade classroom.
 - v. Jesus was not only concerned about the disciples after his departure, he was also ensuring that the disciples knew they would not be deserted.
 - vi. We talk about the Holy Spirit, this Advocate/Comforter/Helper, as a way in which we experience God, who is One even as we know we experience God as Creator, Christ and Spirit.
 - vii. And while the Spirit would not be seen, she would be felt like the wind is felt as it blows over the land, as the heat is felt as it emanates from a bonfire.
- c. In our second passage, Paul uses the religious devotion of the people of Athens to speak about God, who remains unseen but makes God's presence felt
 - i. The people of Athens believed in a multitude of gods, and, just to ensure they hadn't missed one, they had cleverly created a place to worship a god they may have missed along the way.
 - ii. Call it a kind of holy insurance to protect from a god who felt slighted
 - iii. So Paul takes that and says:
 1. You're covering your bases, and you do right to do that.
 2. I'm here to tell you that the one God you don't yet know is in fact the only God, and these others are just idols, human fiction made of stone and precious metals

3. It's a good thing I'm here, Paul basically goes on to say, so that you can know about God and God's chosen, Jesus, whom God raised from the dead.
 4. Believe my words, Paul says, and you'll always be in God's hands
 3. Jesus and Paul were teaching about God's care for us, invisible perhaps, but very much something which we feel in our hearts, and which they help us name as the work of the Spirit.
 - a. Today, on a day when we give God thanks for our mothers, and those faithful people who also mothered us and guided us, we pause to recognize the hand of God at work in them through the Spirit
 - b. I want to celebrate the invisible, maternal love, advocacy and comfort of the Spirit in our lives, and I want to connect it directly not just to the expressions of love from our mothers, but also the resilient presence of a community which embraced us
 - c. In the Presbyterian church we affirm that in order to discern God's will for us, we do it not alone but in community,
 - i. That is, to hear God's voice we listen not only to our own hearts but to the voices of those who are advocating/supporting us in this journey
 - ii. So, like my mom doing a handoff with my teachers so that they would carry on with maternal wisdom and authority,
 - iii. maybe part of our journey of faith is this unseen experience of Jesus handing off our care and guidance to God's Spirit, who mothers us in our hearts and through the wisdom and care of loved ones and perfect strangers
 - d. Think about from the communal perspective, and it means then that we have also been crucial instruments of that Spirit's invisible wind and warmth, offering God's wisdom to advocate for, comfort and help our neighbors.
 4. On this day when we remember and celebrate our mothers, the ones who gave birth to us, as well as the ones who adopted us, and the ones who stepped up to raise us with compassion, and the ones who taught us with wisdom, and the ones who have stood by our side, as we celebrate all of them, remember the same Spirit at work in them has been at work through us, the Spirit who encouraged us so we can encourage others, and advocated for us as we advocate for others.

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