

I. Introduction

A. I heard a story about 11 people hanging from a rope that came down from a helicopter – ten men and one woman. It had been determined that one of them had to get off or the rope would break and they all would die. No one could decide who should let go, so finally the woman said she would. She gave a very touching speech about how she would give her life to save the others because she was a mom and used to putting her needs behind everyone else. All the men started clapping.

B. This is the day we let go of the rope and clap – we applaud motherhood.

C. Of course, we applaud motherhood for a few hours and act as though our recognition makes us even. Perhaps not quite.

D. In a fun article I found in my files – it was written by Garrison Keillor fifteen years ago – he suggested that compensation for mothers should start at a million dollars and a home in the South of France.

E. Flowers and a Hallmark card doesn't quite make us even. Nor does brunch. Nor does this sermon. But today I did want to reflect on Moms and God, based on a passage in Exodus 34

F. What I want to do is affirm Moms and provide some encouragement and perspective for the rest of us, based on what Moses says towards the end of the second book in the Bible – Exodus.

II. This is the Ten Commandments take two.

A. As you may remember, earlier in the book Moses comes down from the Mountain with the Ten Commandments, discovers the people worshipping a golden calf, throws them down and they break in two.

B. He goes back up a bit later and gets them again. I am reading now from Exodus 34: 4: So Moses chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones and went up Mount Sinai early in the morning, as the LORD had commanded him; and he carried the two stone tablets in his hands. ⁵ Then the LORD

I. God's proper name, the name of the covenant, is יהוה (in English translated as LORD), which can be rendered as "I AM", "I am here", "I am with you" or "I will be".

C. Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. ⁶ And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

D. I want us to reflect on something easy to miss in English.

III. But let me back up for a moment to explain why I am turning here.

A. As you know, I am speaking in an empty room. You are not here. My guess is:

1. Some of you are sitting in your living room. Perhaps there are four or five of you gathered around a TV

2. Some of you have this on a lap top and you are listening while making waffles.

3. Some of you may be with your Moms – Mother’s Day is historically the 3rd largest attendance day for church, behind Easter and Christmas Eve. It turns out, what Moms want for Mother’s Day is for their children to go to church.
 4. Some of you may fall into some traditional image of a family – which means, you have some smaller kids at home, which means, the kitchen has been pitted.
 5. Some of you are single Moms.
 6. Some of you are alone.
- B. Mother’s Day sermon are always a bit of a high wire dance because our lives are complicated.
1. The Bible gives us a stunningly honest portrayal of family life – full of all kinds of stories about tension, stress, disappointment, rivalries, estrangements, finger pointing, affairs, even elder abuse and murder.
 2. Hallmark suggests something quite different – and that sets up comparisons that set up most families to come up short.
- C. Let me pause to note, not everyone had a Mom around when they were growing up; not everyone who had a Mom around had a great Mom; Not everyone who wants to be a Mom is a mom, not every Mom thinks they are doing – or that they did - a great job as a Mom. There are lots of ways this day causes lots of stress.
- D. There is a statement that shows up this time of year, “God couldn't be everywhere, so he gave us mothers.” It sounds nice and kind, but Mom’s do not need the pressure to be God as well. I’ve learned that it leads to panic attacks
- E. Father’s Day is, perhaps, a bit more complicated, because:
1. Fathers are more likely to not be around
 2. And because fathers are more likely to be estranged from their children as adults. Paul’s advice to Dads in Ephesians 6 is to not provoke their children – to not push too hard.
 3. There are some great dads. But many people did not have a father who was as safe and loving as our Father God is. And so my experience is that Father’s Day is a bit more complicated.
- F. But there are challenges with Mother’s Day as well. What I want to do is reflect on this passage and on what it says about God and about Moms.
- IV. What you think about God is the most important thing you think and the second most important thing about you.
- A. The most important thing about you is what God thinks of you.
 - B. But our view of God – and here I mean two things:
 1. I do mean whatever is most important to you. Your god is whatever you value most – that might be your kids or your job or your health or your money or your reputation. Idolatry is the perhaps the most frequent topic in the Bible because it lies at the heart of where we go wrong.
 2. As humans we love and worship and ascribe meaning to things. We cannot help it. We all have a god. So, when I say
 - 3.

4.

C. Alongside that, many can see their way to say, I want to focus on God – the eternal, transcendent, All-powerful Creator. The God of the Bible. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

1. This is a Christian worship service. You are listening in. I am going to assume that you are at least aware of the God who has revealed himself in this Book.

2. You are aware of Jesus – the Son of God, who is “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.

3. You are aware of the God who has revealed himself with lots of different titles

4. And his name – Yahweh, I AM.

5. I want to note that one of the ways we get things wrong is to have a wrong understanding of .

D. So... in the Bible God has revealed himself as a:

1. A father – who runs to get greet his prodigal son

2. A Dad – that is the term Jesus taught us to use in The Lord’s Prayer

3. He is a judge, a shepherd, a king – there are a lot of anthropomorphic images of God to help us understand him.

E. In Exodus 34 God is compared to a Mother

V. This passage – which was written about 1500 BC in the Ancient Near East – teaches us some encouraging things.

A. Many living at that time thought that the universe was spiritually super-charged – full of “gods” and “goddesses.” The so-called gods of the gap. What they could not understand they attributed to a god.

1. As an aside let me note that this week I will be interviewing Dr. John Lennox.

2. .

B. But these divine beings were anything but nice. Read any ancient text. The gods were finicky, capricious and ready to fly off the handle at the slightest infraction. So, you made sacrifices to keep on their good side. Or at least to stay off of their bad side.

1. A bird or a goat. Perhaps a bull.

2. If you remember World Civ in high school and the story of Troy – which takes place around the same time as the story of Moses on Mount Sinai – you might remember the Greek king Agamemnon was sailing across the Mediterranean to fight in the Trojan War, but his fleet is dead in the water, no wind. Because Artemis — the goddess of Greece — is angry. In an effort to appease her he makes a brutal sacrifice — his daughter Iphigenia.

3. These were the kind of things you did for the gods.

C. Then Yahweh - the one true Creator God! — comes to your rescue. He saves you out of Egypt. Leads you through the Red Sea and across the desert. Gives you food and water to survive the journey. And you’ve done nothing to deserve any of it.

D. Who is this God? He turns out to be nothing like the other “gods.” Our text today says He is – Ex. 34:6: “compassionate and gracious.”

1. In Hebrew that is hahum vay-hanun in Hebrew.⁴ There is a bit of a word play here. These two words sound alike and they are side by side to help explain each other.

2. And here is my point: Rahum means “compassionate.” It is usually translated “merciful.”⁵ It’s from a root word meaning “female womb.” The idea behind it is the feeling a mother has toward her infant child.

3. This is the word used in Exodus 34:6: The Lord [Yahweh] is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love..

4. The Lord feels for you like a Mom does for her infant child. This is quite a statement about God and about Moms.

VI. Tragically, for some of you this doesn’t connect. Your family of origin was so warped out of shape – or is so warped out of shape - that you have no idea what a compassionate parent is like. Your dad was always mad at you, just waiting for you to screw up. Or your mom was the archetypal perfectionist — always nagging at you, critical and condescending. You were never smart enough. Athletic enough. Pretty enough. Good enough. Or maybe your parents just weren’t around.

A. For some reason, the idea of Yahweh as a parent – in particular here as a Mom - doesn’t resonate.

VII. But for others of you, this taps into a deep part of your soul. Especially if you’re a parent yourself. You know there is no love as fierce as that of a mother or father for a child.

A. The love of a man for a woman, of a soldier for their country, of a sports fan for their team — none of it comes even close to the love of a Mom for their child. It’s this emotive, visceral, in-the-marrow-of-your-bones kind of love that is stronger than life itself.

B. And that is how God feels about you. Pause for a moment. Let that sink in . .

VIII. Exodus 34 is not the only place a Mom is used to describe God. It happens again in Isaiah 49:15-16:

A. Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands...

B. And in the Psalms, God I pictured like a mother hen who, if you ever watch one, shelters its babies under its wings to protect it.

IX. In the Bible God is generally portrayed as a Father.

A. He is the Father of Jesus and He is also our Father when we believe in Him. But God is like a mother too. He is compassionate like a mother has compassion for her child, the ‘fruit of her womb’.

B.