



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God, our Father, and the Lord, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The other morning, I woke up and I thought, "I want to make some tea with my mom." Now, I'm Indian, so tea is not that tepid stuff that the English drink where they take a little tea bag, put it in some hot water, and dip it in, and then put a drop of milk. Indian tea, which you probably know by the Hindi word, *chai*, but I'm Gujarati, so in my mother's language, it's *cha*. You make *cha* the right way by starting not with water, but with milk. Whole milk, with its 4% milk-fat glory. Unless you live in India, and then you use buffalo milk with 8% milk fat. And you put the milk in with a bunch of tea bags, not just one little tea bag, but like three tea bags per cup. And you throw it all in a saucepan, and then you add the sugar. Lots if you live in my house. But it is to taste.

Sugar is actually less important. What is crucial are the spices. Cinnamon, ginger, cardamom, cloves, nutmeg, and here's the trick, a little bit of black pepper. And if you do it right, it forms this really thick coating on top of the tea bags and the milk, and then you boil the whole thing vigorously. Just when you think it's going to boil over from the saucepan, you take it off, and then you put it back on. And you do it over and over again because that thick coating of spices and all those tea bags is supposed to form a beautiful color. In my language, it's called *kadak*. *Kadak* means crispy. *Kadak* means it's darker than I am. That tea is rich and it's strong, and that's the tea I learned from my mother.

So having this cup of tea with my mom seems eminently reasonable, except, as many of you know, my mother has been dead for seven years. And it made me wonder why I wanted this. What was I hoping for? So that very morning, I called a friend. Her mother had died fairly recently, and today is the first Mother's Day without her. So I asked her, "Tell me something that your mama did for you." And she said that she and her husband just the other day laughed and then cried because she got a couple stains on her blouse, and her mom was known as the stain remover queen. She had three things you need: time, Tide, and a toothbrush. But now her mama was gone. And it wasn't just the blouse that suffered, it was she who suffered because her mother was no longer there to do that.

Now, both my friend and I were adults when our mothers died, and both of us are actually mothers ourselves, and yet both of us longed for our moms. Why do we still want our moms? I think we want our mothers to always be there when we need them. We want our moms to be thinking about us, to take care of us, to teach us things we don't know, to believe in us when we don't, and help us just because they love us. And it doesn't matter how old you are, and it doesn't matter how old your mother is. Deep down, you want a mother who knows how to be with you, lets you be fully yourself, hair down, gloves off, no makeup, just the real you, and to be loved that way.

There is this ideal of the mother that we all carry. Real-life mothers, they don't always live up to that ideal. My mom didn't. But it doesn't stop us from having these visions of a mother whose belief in us is unwavering. Now, Mother's Day is supposed to be the day where we children give some recognition to our moms, letting them know we see the work that they're doing for us. But for many of us, Mother's Day doesn't live up to the ideal either. This day can be fraught with all kinds of emotional triggers and pain. Obviously, if your mom has died, you're doing the good work of mourning today that happens every Mother's Day from now on. And if your child died, no matter how much time has passed or how old they were when they died, their absence today, it demands a lot of you.

And then there are those of us who do not have moms who actually know how to take care of us. They're battling their own neurosis, their own psychosis, or other problems that they have allowed to interfere with their mothering of us, and they've neglected loving us in a way that we needed, expected, or desired. And some of us mothers have children who are estranged from us, sometimes because of what we've done and left undone, but sometimes because our kids are battling their own demons, and they're lost, and we don't hear from them on this day or any other day.

And I know women who avoid church on Mother's Day because they don't have children, either by choice or by circumstance, and this day just, it seems to question what being female means, and it can try to make you feel less than. And then lately, I've been wondering what it's like for children who have two dads. What are they doing on this day? Mother's Day is not always the beautiful celebration of mothering that we idealize. Why do we have these ideals of mothers? What are you and I longing for? Well, here's what I think on this Mother's Day. We're actually not longing for our mothers to be perfect. What we're looking for in our mothers is actually what God, our mother, is giving us.

So I was reading this book called “Quest for the Living God.” It was written in 2007 by Elizabeth Johnson, who is not a mother, but she's a sister. She's a sister of the St. Joseph Order, a Catholic order of nuns that has produced some bad mama jmmas, like Sister Helen Prejean, who was made famous by the movie Dead Man

Walking, and it's about her work with men on death row. And then there was Sister Karen Klimczak, who worked in a house for paroled convicts in Buffalo, and she was murdered on a Good Friday by a resident that she was trying to help. These women don't mess.

So Sister Elizabeth Johnson, she was one of the first women ever to receive a PhD from Catholic University of America, and she became a distinguished professor of theology at Fordham. And the book, "The Quest for the Living God," it got her in hot water with a bunch of US Catholic bishops, and they wrote a statement, and they told Catholic schools and universities not to use the book. Sales of the book naturally soared after that happened. In the book, she has this really powerful way of speaking about our desire to know the living God, and there is one chapter exclusively devoted to the vision of God as mother. And *sophia* – *sophia* is the Greek word for wisdom. In the Old Testament, wisdom is God whose form is a woman, who teaches about justice, saves us from our foolish decisions, and sets a feast for everyone to experience the great abundance of the Lord.

But truthfully, I was more interested in what Professor Elizabeth Johnson said that is so relevant for us today. Even 20 years ago when she wrote the book, she noted that Christianity and the religious landscape was changing. People were no longer interested in the traditional views of God. But, she said, what has not changed is our yearning as human beings to know a living God who is the source of our own energy and spirit, a God who promotes life through liberation and healing, a creator of plenitude that is beyond our capacity to fully grasp or measure. We need holy with a capital H. We want a God who is bigger than we are, and yet knows us, understands us, and walks with us in our daily lives.

And this is who our triune God is. God will always be more than you and I can comprehend, and God will always be near us. God is a mystery, and God is our advocate. Here's a story. St. Augustine, fifth century, he's writing a book. He's trying to write a book called "On the Trinity," and I guess he's stuck. So he goes for a walk on the Mediterranean seashore, and he gets there, and he spies a little child. And this boy has gone off the shore, and he's dug a hole in the sand. And then he has a pail, and he goes over to the sea. He fills the pail with water. He goes over to the hole he dug, and he empties the pail of water in the hole, and then he does it again, and he keeps doing it.

So Augustine approaches the child and says, "What are you doing?" And the child says, "I am trying to put the sea into the hole." And Augustine says, "You can't do that. It won't fit." And the child, who is an angel in disguise, says to Augustine, "And you can't put the triune God in your mind. It won't fit." The mystery of God is bigger than you and I can ever comprehend. And this is the mystery that we cling to when we're facing a world that we cannot comprehend, a

world that is chaotic, maddening, and unjust. We need a God that is bigger than this world. But we also need a God who is near us.

And that brings me to Jesus and mothers. Did you know that Jesus Christ is the reason that you long for a mother? Because when Jesus came into this world, we had everything we longed for. We had God near us. We had God present. But when Jesus was departing, He made a promise to us. Jesus promised us a mother. In the Gospel of John, as Jesus goes to prepare a place for us, He sends the Holy Spirit, and He tells us very clearly, I will not leave you orphaned. Did you hear that? We are not orphaned. We are not motherless. We have the Spirit. Jesus has sent His Spirit, and in her we have the one who mothers us, who stays with us, who cares for us, who knows us, who picks us up when we have fallen.

And you know her because she knows you. She is your fierce advocate. She is the one who created you. She fashioned you in her image. She knows what you can do, and she knows that you can do what seems impossible. You can create beauty in ugly spaces. You can make good when you're surrounded by evil. She knows what you are capable of, and she calls it out. She says to you, "My beloved one, my child, you need to be you. And never be afraid of being you, because I am your mother. I have made you in my image. I called you by your name. I know your goodness. I know your power. I know who you are. I love you even when others cannot, and you cannot. I will fight for you. I will be your advocate."

And that is why we all want a mother. We want a mother who's not ashamed of us. We want a mom to see us. We want a mother to love us. We want a mother to believe in us even when no one else will, including ourselves. And here's the beautiful thing. When you have someone who advocates for you, you actually change. You become holy. So like every good mama says to the child that she loves, so the Holy Spirit says to you and to me on this day, she holds your face in her hands and she looks at you in your eyes lovingly and she says, "Knock it off! Stop your whining and your complaining about your life. I designed you. I made you. I am delighted in you. I need you to live, not languish. I need you not to be afraid of yourself. Stop hiding. I need you to live in the fullness of your life until you die, because that is why I gave you life and for no reason less."

So on this Mother's Day, may you remember you are not orphaned. Whether you have a biological mother or not, whether your mother is living or she's not, whether your mother cares for you or she doesn't, Jesus has given you the Spirit, the advocate, the mother of us all. The Spirit knows you since the day you were made and has taught you how to live in this world. And this mother loves you. Loves you. No makeup, hair down, gloves off. Just you. So now go and live your holy life. Happy Mother's Day to our God and to us. I suggest you celebrate with a strong cup of tea.