

-I know it has been several weeks since I have been back with you following Soren's birth, but, this happens to be (apart from our Spirit of Hope recognitions last week) my first sermon back. Which is awesome! (at least for me, I don't know about you) Thank you again for all of your support of Abby, me, and Soren through these holy first few months of being a family. I can't tell you how much it truly means to me.

-I don't know of a better time to preach one's first sermon back from a birth than on Mother's Day. Mother's Day: a day that was first celebrated by activist Anna Marie Jarvis in 1908 when she held a remembrance service for her mother, Ann Reeves Jarvis, at St. Andrew's Methodist Church in Grafton, West Virginia. Her campaign to make Mother's Day a recognized holiday in the United States began after that. Ann Reeves Jarvis (the mother) had been a peace activist who cared for wounded soldiers on both sides of the American Civil War, and created Mother's Day Work Clubs to address public health issues. The campaign by her daughter, Anna, to celebrate moms caught on and in 1914 President Woodrow Wilson signed a proclamation to create Mother's Day as a national holiday on the second Sunday in May.

-It's always a tension every year for how much pastors emphasize Mother's Day in worship because for some, this day can be painful. It may bring up powerful emotions of the fact that some of you may not have gotten to know your mothers, or maybe were abused by your mothers, or maybe are mourning the fact that you can't be a mother for one reason or another yourself. I want to be sensitive to these things as all of these emotions are legitimate and point to the complexity of birth, of raising a child, and of motherhood.

-But even with these powerful emotions and experiences of some, I don't think it's helpful to ignore some very important images of being a mom, many that I believe can really help us in our faith and even propel the church forward in a more loving and open way.

-Being a new dad, I have witnessed first hand the messiness of birth. Let's be honest: giving birth is messy in many many ways. It's unpredictable, it's frightening, it's exhilarating, it's time warping. Abby's own beginning of motherhood began at 6am with contractions that were pretty powerful. She woke me up around 6:45 when she sounded like she was breathing through a straw through these contractions. "That's not how she normally breathes," I thought waking up. So we started to time contractions and made the ever important call to our doula. For those of you who are not familiar, doulas (or birth coaches) are incredible women who help coach the couple through the complexities of labor. Our doula, Cerisse, was there every step of the way.

- "Do people think that going to the hospital is the right next step?" said Cerisse after it was clear that Abby's labor was moving incredibly fast. "Yeah.....uh.....I guess it is. Wow!" Cerisse quickly and calmly came over to our house, helped Abby into the car, and we all made the journey to St. Pat's hospital. Cerisse seemed to always know what

was ahead. She updated the nurses with information, she got food for me knowing that I sometimes get nervous around the doctor's office, and she helped us stay calm even when the doctor warned that if Soren's slowed heart rate didn't come up we would have to think about an emergency C-Section (luckily it did come up and we didn't have to go down that road)

-When we think about Mother's Day, it's our tendency to lean into the flowers and candy, the "thanks mom for all you do" kind of things. But for me having now witnessed the birth of my son, the most powerful thing I believe I saw in the beginning of motherhood was the creation of space. Cerisse, our doula, was "our mother" during the whole labor process and beyond not because she was just giving us "motherly advice", but because she created holy space around us in a very messy event.

-Following our two days in the hospital, we took Soren home for the first time. Abby's sister was at work and her mom wasn't going to come until the following day. Our house was insanely quiet compared with all of the background noises of the hospital. It was too quiet and Abby and I began to panic: "What the bleep do we do now??" We frantically called Cerisse who brought over some happy-hour snacks and we sat together in our living room talking. She didn't have all of the answers, but she was able to create the space we needed to not be afraid.

- "And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one." What kind of protection do you think Jesus is talking about here in our gospel reading? I don't think this is a "sword or armed militia" type of protection, nor is it a "wall them off" type of protection either. The type of protection Jesus is, I believe, talking about here is a "protection by making space". Holy space matters, a lot.

-What if this Mother's Day inspired the church to see itself more as a doula and less as a soldier in its mission to the world?

-The historical church is haunted, I believe, by this notion that we have to almost beat the word of God into people. I have heard story after story from many of you who grew up in churches where confirmation students had to say the Nicene Creed from memory perfectly or else, or "mission trips" whose success were gauged by how many souls were saved, or new members quizzed about if they are *really* serious about accepting Jesus into their hearts. What purpose does that type of mission serve besides power play and intimidation?

-What if that mission to be "soldiers" and dictate the word of God to people is outdated? Maybe the people of God are hungry for something different or were never hungry for that in the first place. What if our goal is to simply create and protect space that allows the Holy Spirit to come in? Can our church see itself as a doula for the Spirit?

-Today is Katrina Olson's first communion. What a special day it is indeed. This past week, Katrina helped me bake communion bread which we will use in worship today. As

we were baking bread, we talked a lot about what Holy Communion means. I gave her a little history and a very important word that the church uses a lot: sacrament.

Sacrament: which means simply a specific way that God appears to us in which we can understand. God appears to us in the bread and wine of Holy Communion in a specific way every time (in, with, and under). This is why sacraments are important (Baptism and Holy Communion) because they allow us tangible access to God working in the world. At the end of our time together, I jokingly quizzed Katrina again: "Now what is a sacrament?" You could see her tired brain start to turn....."um.... I forgot," she said.

-Now as a church we could say: "You forgot what sacrament means! No first communion for you!" But is that our mission?

-Holy Communion is first and foremost a space where God enters, fills, and dwells with us. It is an experience of God that we need to allow time and room for....not a term in a theological dictionary. So does Katrina know and understand every little thing about the process of Holy Communion? No. But, does she get what Holy Communion is all about and will come learn more in the space that our church provides for her in the coming years more about how God works in her life? Absolutely.

-This, I believe, is what it means to be a doula of the Spirit. This is what I take away this first Mother's Day of having a child. God bless all mother's, mother-to-be's, and all who desire to be a mother, in their quest to make holy space in chaotic and frenzied times. May we as disciples of Christ follow their lead. Amen.