

Carol's and Jeff's reflection: 'a Meditation on Mother's Day'

Jeff: Happy Mother's Day, Carol!

Carol: Thanks Jeff!

Jeff: Today's gospel reading from John seems appropriate for Mother's Day. Jesus' favourite word in this passage seems to be the word 'love'. By my count, the word appears nine times in nine verses.

Carol: Yes. Jesus says things like:

"As God has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love"

'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.'

'I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.'

Jeff: 'Love' is one of those wonderful but ambiguous words, especially in the English language, because we use it to convey all sorts of feelings and 'relationships' – we love our children, we love our dogs and cats, we love classical music, we love daffodils and pizza and curling!

Carol: Maybe whenever we read of Jesus using the word 'love', there should be a foot note to explain what he meant.

Jeff: It would probably be a book-length footnote, because it seems to me that when Jesus says 'love' he is taking us into the reality of God, and there is a lot of history and a lot of stories connected to the word.

Carol: In that sense, it's a lot like 'Mother's Day'. Canadian Mother's Day is Celebrated on the 2 Sunday of May, something that we have inherited from our brothers and sisters in the US. But the idea of Mother's Day is celebrated in any places at different times during the year. Did you know that not only is there a lot of history and stories connected to this special day, but there is even some controversy!

Jeff: Really!

Carol: Let me start with a couple of the stories. Well, before Mother's Day was created as an official holiday in the United States in 1914, there had been a few possibilities about a day to honour mothers.

Jeff: I remember reading a book about the history of the peace movement, and I think it said that Mother's Day was originally about promoting peace. Wasn't there a Mother's Peace Day.

Carol: There was a woman named Julia Ward Howe who worked for an end to slavery; and for the right for women to vote, and she also worked for peace. She wanted June 2

to be designated as Mother's Peace Day and she urged all mothers to work for peace.

Jeff: So, she wanted a day to both empower mothers to take action and a day to hold forth a vision of peace in the world.

Carol: Yes, and both taking action and creating a world of peace were aspects of the story and history of Anna Jarvis, the woman who organized the first 'unofficial' mother's day celebration.

Jeff: What was her story?

Carol: Well, Anna Jarvis' mother was an activist. During the Civil War, she had cared for soldiers regardless of which side of the conflict they fought for, and later she organized what she called "Mother's Friendship Day" . This was to be a day to bring national healing. She invited soldiers who had served in both the Union and Confederate armies to meet, to get to know each of us human beings, to start learning how to live with respect for each other.

Jeff: Wow, that sounds like an early version of Truth and Reconciliation commissions!

Carol: Anna Jarvis' mother also invited the mothers of the soldiers to gather and talk, to recognize that during the war they had all been concerned for, and sometimes grieving for their sons who had to go into combat.

Jeff: She was creating a community of people with shared experiences, a new community based on shared humanity rather than shared politics or opinions.

Carol: Yes, and after her mother died, Anna Jarvis lobbied for a day to honour mother's. In 1905, three years after her mother's death, Anna Jarvis held a public celebration for her mother, in effect creating the first mother's day celebration.

Jeff: So, where did the controversy come in?

Carol: That came after Mother's Day became an official holiday, and Anna Jarvis felt that, rather than being a day to honour the mother love that creates a better world, the day became commercialized and the focus shifted to businesses making money from the idea.

Jeff: The original intent became lost! I guess that's like what we said about Jesus' use of the word 'love'. When we use the word 'love' to just mean that we like something, the word loses the sense of story and history it had when Jesus used it.

Carol: Yes. For Jesus, 'love' was a word that described God's relation to creation and to humanity – love that created everything and said it was good.

Jeff: Love that heard the cries of suffering from slaves in Egypt and sent Moses to lead

them into a wilderness and eventually into creating a new community that was to care for all people, especially the most vulnerable in that society – orphans, widows, the poor.

Carol: Love that was expressed by Jesus as he welcomed the lame and the blind and the frightened, as he offered ‘free health care’ to heal and restore people to being welcomed into communities...

Jeff: When he told his disciples to forgive even those who were their enemies; when he refused to send the hungry away, but said that what food they had, even if only a few loaves of bread, was to be shared with everyone...

Carol: When he saw that Zacchaeus, who was ostracized by everyone in this village, was a person made in the image of God – a child of God.

Jeff: Jesus said that he was loved by God, and the love he expressed in life was God’s love flowing through him.

Carol: And that love created a new way for people to relate. Jesus told his disciples that no longer was he calling them his students. He was calling them friends. He said that loving others was to befriend them, to treat everyone as a friend, a neighbour, another child of God.

Jeff: So, this Mother’s Day, we can remember the stories of mother’s who envisioned a world of peace, a world in which people learn to befriend one another despite differences, a world in which we affirm our shared humanity as a gift from God, and we allow God’s love to unite us in love.

Carol: We love as Jesus loved, as agents of God’s love.

Jeff: Thanks be to God. AMEN

Carol: and AMEN!