



**TRUST THE LIGHT**

**GROW THROUGH THE MUD**

**BELIEVE IN NEW BEGINNINGS**

**CELEBRATING THE FEMININE STORY**

St. John's Church  
September 10, 2023

## THE GENDER OF GOD

God is more than words can say. And yet, we use words – a *lot* of words – in church when we read scripture, pray, and worship. These words have power and meaning to create images of the mystery into which we want to grow, which then guides our spiritual relationship with God and each other. And this image of God is almost always male.

When we use only one category of descriptive words to articulate God's being, God's magnificence is limited. God possesses every trait and characteristic of both feminine and masculine dimensions. Remember that on the sixth day, God creates human beings, creating them in the image and likeness of God's self. If the female and the male are created in the image of God, then God's image and likeness must contain both qualities of the feminine and masculine.

Scripture supports this over and over. Isaiah 46 uses strong maternal images: "Listen to me, House of Jacob, all you who remain of the House of Israel, you who have been carried since birth, whom I have carried since the time you were born. In your old age I shall be still the same, when your hair is gray, I shall still support you. I have already done so, I have carried you, I shall still support and deliver you" (Is. 46:3-4).

Jesus himself uses feminine images. His dialog with Nicodemus about being "born again" is a metaphor about God and God's relationship with humans. Recall that giving birth is strictly a female biological function.

Is God a woman?

No. But neither is God a man. We ourselves are male and female, each gifted with our own traits and abilities that do not need to be assigned a gender. But to acknowledge with our language that God, too, shares a wide spectrum of characteristics can make room for our image of God to grow and blossom.

## WOMEN IN SCRIPTURE

In the next four weeks we will be looking at a few feminine figures in our Biblical story:

1. Tamar (Genesis 38:1-26)
2. The Daughters of Zelophehad - 5 sisters (Numbers 27: 1-11)
3. Rahab (Joshua 2:1-24 and 6: 22-25)
4. Eve (Genesis 3:1-20)

## MINISTERS OF THE LITURGY

Altar Guild	Katy Lytle & Martha Moewes
Sound	Oscar Trevino
Greeter	Kathy Riley
Greeter	Susan McEvoy
Worship Leader	Steve Nickles
Reader	Scott Larsen
Preacher	Megan Nickles
Intercessor	Tim Glatzer
Presider	Megan Nickles
Communion Server	Mary Dillivan
Communion Server	Kim Dillivan
Communion Bread	Jessica Smith
Coffee Hour	Steve & Meg Nickles

## OUR PRAYERS

Anglican Cycle of Prayer: The Church of Ireland  
Diocesan Cycle of Prayer: Christ Church, Glenrock

Carolyn & Family; Laurel & Rusty; Hugh B. & Marge; Richmond & Rich; Lee & Kelly; Hunter, Charlotte & Mike; Shirley & Deb; Richard & Jennifer; Tim & Lynnae; Robin & Mark; Margie & Josey; Bobbi & Bentley; Bob & Charlotte; Brandon & Diedre, Deb, Rob R., Kathy E., Martha, Tammy, Rob K., Bobby B., Larry, Alex, Irene, Nancy, Alan, Katy, Marlynn, Sue, Kahli, Ron and Jane	Justin, Jacob, Patrick, Reece, Coleman, Bryce and Nathan who are serving in the military.  Ann, Josephine and Don who reside in care centers.
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## CELEBRATIONS

Birthday: Cam Barker—11<sup>th</sup>, Jennifer DeWitt Walsh—11<sup>th</sup>

## PRELUDE

“Flower Duet from ‘Lakme’” Delibes.


## OPENING HYMN *Verses 1,2,4,5*




1. There is a line of wo - men, ex - tend - ing back to Eve,  
2. So sing a song of Sa - rah, to laughter she gave birth,  
3. There is a line of wo - men who took on pow' ful men,  
4. So sing a song of Ship - hrah with Pu - ah at her hand,  
5. There is a line of wo - men who stood by Je - sus' side,



1. whose role in sha - ping his - to - ry God on - ly could con - ceive.  
2. and sing a song of Ta - mar who stood for wo - men's worth;  
3. de - fy - ing laws and scru - ples to let life live a - gain.  
4. en - gaged to kill male chil - dren they foiled the king's com - mand  
5. who housed him while he min - is - tered and held him when he died.



1. And though, through end - less a - ges, their wit - ness was re - pressed,  
2. and sing a song of Han - nah who bar - gained with her Lord;  
3. And though, de - spite their tri - umph, their stor - ies stayed un - told,  
4. and sing a song of Ra - hab who shel - tered spies and lied;  
5. And though they claimed he'd ris - en, their news was deemed sus - pect



1. God val - ued and en - couraged them through whom the world was blessed.  
2. and sing a song of Ma - ry who bore and bred God's Word.  
3. God kept their num - ber grow - ing, cre - a - tive, strong, and bold.  
4. and sing a song of Es - ther, pre - ven - ting gen - o - cide.  
5. till Je - sus stood a - mong them, his wo - man - ly e - lect.

## GATHERING

We come this day, to rejoice in our Creator.

We gather this day in gratitude for the life which surrounds us.

We meet in the name of our God:

The One who plants us, tends us, and gives us life.

## MARY'S SONG OF PRAISE (MAGNIFICAT)



1. My soul is filled with joy  
2. I am low - ly as a child,  
3. I pro - claim your pow'r, O God!  
4. To the hun - gry you give food,  
5. In your love you now ful - fill



as I sing to God, my Sav - ior.  
but I know from this day for - ward  
You do marv - els for your ser - vants:  
send the rich a - way — em - pty  
what you prom - ised to your peo - ple.



You have looked up - on your ser - vant,  
that my name will be re - mem - bered,  
though you scat - tered the proud - heart - ed,  
In your mer - cy you are mind - ful  
I will praise you, God, my Sav - ior,



you have vis - it - ed your peo - ple.  
and the world will call me bless - ed.  
and de - stroy the might of princ - es  
of the peo - ple you have cho - sen.  
ev - er - last - ing is your mer - cy.

### Refrain



And ho - ly is your name through all gen - er - a - tions!



Ev - er - last - ing is your mer - cy to the peo - ple



you have cho - sen, and ho - ly is your name!

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## PRAYER OF THE DAY

God is with you.

**And also with you.**

Let us pray.

Mothering God, in the beginning you called us into a love that transcends our gender. Guide us in our remembrance of the women who have gone before, mothers of the faith both named and unnamed, who testified with ferocity and faith to the Spirit of wisdom and healing. May we remember those who raised us in faith, who fed and nourished us in their joys and sorrows, so that we may cultivate and harvest your all-encompassing love, in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

## SCRIPTURE

*We sit.*

In scripture we find the mothers of the faith,  
who teach us to resist evil with boldness, to lead with wisdom, and to heal.  
Hear the Word of God according to \_\_\_\_\_

*After the Reading*

Word of God, our sacred story.

**Thanks be to God.**

## SERMON

## PRAYERS

God of grace, in the story of creation you made the earth a garden and entrusted it to us to till and to keep,  
a place of peace and beauty where we could walk with you.  
Meet us, we pray, in all the gardens where we go for nourishment,  
refreshment and solace, saying

Nurturing God, **hear our prayer.**

*The Leader continues with the prayers, concluding with*

God of the harvest, make us faithful stewards in the labor you have called us to share, planting and cultivating, planning and protecting,  
and offering to you the return of our growing and yearning,  
through your Son, Jesus Christ, and in the persistent care of the Holy Spirit.  
**Amen.**

## **GARDEN PRAYER**

O cosmic Birther of all radiance and vibration,  
soften the ground of our being and carve out a space within us  
where your Presence can abide.

Fill us with your creativity

so that we may be empowered to bear the fruit of your mission.

Let each of our actions bear fruit in accordance with our desire.

Endow us with the wisdom to produce and share  
what each being needs to grow and flourish.

Untie the tangled threads of destiny that bind us,  
as we release others from the entanglement of past mistakes.

Do not let us be seduced by that which would divert us from our true purpose,  
but illuminate the opportunities of the present moment.

For you are the ground and the fruitful vision,  
the birth, power, and fulfillment,  
as all is gathered and made whole once again.

And So It Is!

## **THE PEACE**

*We stand.*

The peace of Christ be always with you.

**And also with you.**

*We may greet each other in the name of God.*

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **OFFERTORY**

Upon our fields your stars rain down their blessed dust.

Bread and vegetables from earth are also from heaven.

Help us to see in our daily bread your presence

as we offer our first fruits and our very selves to your service.

## **MUSIC**

“Singer of Life, All Songs are Flowers,” Chancel Choir, First Unitarian Church of Oakland.

## **GREAT THANKSGIVING**

*We stand.*

The Spirit of God surrounds and holds you.

**God's love rests upon you.**

With the faith of children in their mother's embrace, open your hearts to God.

**Our hearts are open, we lift them up.**

Give thanks to the love which has surrounded you from the womb.

**We give thanks for the life which flows in and through us,  
the love which surrounds us, and the arms which enfold us.**

God of our grandmothers and mothers:

of Eve and Dina, Tamar and Miriam,

Phoebe, the Syrophenician woman, the woman at the well,

Mary and Martha, Mary of Magdala, and Mother Mary.

You call us to cry out and lament injustice

but also to sing and dance with Hannah's words:

There is no God but you

you made the world; it is yours.

You protect your people and keep them from stumbling.

You call us to put on our aprons and serve,

to help people understand your ways

to go where you go, to die where you die,

and to rise again when we have died to the world.

We come to your open and expanding table

in this season of ripening abundance

to celebrate the life you have given us,

remembering your sacrifice.

In Jesus you opened a gate and a path into your presence

to share a lush and fruitful communion with you.

And so with all the saints and angels past and present we sing your praise.

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,**

**God of power and might,**

**heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

**Hosanna in the highest.**

**Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord.**

**Hosanna in the highest.**



God of warmth and companionship,  
you bring us to your table meeting all who come with an open hand  
and with the blessed harvest of bread and wine.

Grant us the humility to touch the soils from which they spring,  
that we might become more human,  
that we might mend our rift from your creation,  
that we might then know the holiness of life,  
that we might experience life from your hand.

For you planted humanity in a garden  
and began our resurrection in a garden.  
our memory and hope lie in a garden,  
tended and glowing with the radiance of the Holy Spirit.

Before he went to the garden, on the night before he died,  
while at supper with his disciples,

Jesus took bread, gave you thanks, and broke it, saying:

'Take, eat. This is my Body, broken for you.'

After supper he took the cup, gave you thanks, and gave it to them, saying:

'Drink this, all of you. This is my Blood of the new covenant;  
it is poured out for you, and for all, for the forgiveness of sins.

Do this to remember me.'

This is the mystery of faith:

**Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again.**

Protective and loving God,

look with mercy on all your people whose longings are unmet.

When your people plead for the chance to be creative, productive, or nurturing,  
give them gentleness, fulfillment, and purpose.

When your people yearn to bring your life into the life of others,  
to bring comfort to the afflicted, or to bring trust to the wounded,  
give them courage, wisdom, and patience.

Holy Spirit, in the power of gusts and pleasure of breeze,  
move across and among us

and alight upon these gifts of bread and wine,  
that they may be the body and blood of Jesus,  
and that we may be friends in his household,  
forgiven, refreshed, and made new.

**AMEN.**

*The leader breaks the bread. Silence is kept.*

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

**We are all one body, for we all share in the one bread.**

God's gifts for God's people.

## COMMUNION

*Please come to the table, whether you are single, married or divorced, drinking, using or sober, abled, disabled, or ill, gay, straight, or discovering, wealthy, getting by or in debt; whether you have a green thumb or not. Christ meets us all.*

*We approach the altar beginning with those sitting in the last rows; they shall be first. Approach the rail from the left aisle and take a cup; used cups go on the tray on the right. You may receive only bread or only wine. Our Eucharistic bread is handmade and robust. If you prefer a wafer, please tell your server.*

*Receiving the bread and wine is a central act of worship in the Episcopal Church.*

## MUSIC

“Garden,” Matt Maher.

“God Is God,” Joan Baez.

## GRATITUDE

*We stand.*

Good and gracious God,  
we thank you for the feast of bread and wine,  
for the people with whom we shared it,  
and your presence among us.

We rejoice that we find ourselves eclipsed by the magnitude  
of generosity and mystery.

We praise you for the people of our past  
who have carried your story forward,

that it may dwell in us:

the judges, the prophets,

the martyrs, the nurses,

the bakers, cooks, and gleaners,

poets, lovers, and saints

who are near to us in the shadow of awareness,

in the crevices of memory,

in the landscape of our dreams.

Let their witness and our communion with them  
strengthen us for work of our coming days,

Amen.

## CLOSING HYMN



1. God of the wom - en who answer - ed your call, -  
2. God of the wom - en who walked Jes - us' Way, -  
3. God of the wom - en long put to the test, -  
4. O God of Phoe - be and min - is - ters all, -

1. Trust - ing your prom - is - es, giv - ing their all, -  
2. Giv - ing their re - sourc - es, learn - ing to pray, -  
3. Left out of stor - ies, for - gott - en, op - pressed, -  
4. May we be joy - ful in answer - ing your call. -

1. Wom - en like Han - nah and Shiph - rah and Ruth -  
2. Mar - y, Prisc - ill - a and Dorc - as, and more -  
3. Qui - et - ly ask - ing: "Who smiled at my birth?" -  
4. Give us the strength of your Spir - it so near

1. Give us their cour - age to live in your truth.  
2. May we give free - ly as they did be - fore.  
3. In Jes - us' dy - ing you show us our worth.  
4. That we may share in your min - is - try here.

Text: 10 10 10 10; Ancient Irish; tr. by Mary E. Byrne, 1905; fr. Eleanor Hull's *Poem Book of the Gael*, 1912, alt.  
Music: Trad. Irish Melody; adapt. from *The Church Hymnary*, 1927.

## SENDING

Go forth, enrobed in the nurturing of the Spirit,  
with Christ's imprint upon you and  
God's tender care enriching you.  
Tend your garden, bearing the fruits of  
God's goodness and grace.  
We go to love and serve. Alleluia!

## POSTLUDE

"Let the Mystery Be," Iris Dement.

## SOURCES

**Gathering, Affirmation:** Tim Glatzer

**Prayer of the Day, words before Scripture, Offertory Sentence:** Adapted from *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*, Claiborne, Wilson-Hartgrove, Okoro. Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

**Prayers of the People:** Adapted from *Prayers on a Garden Theme*, ©The Anglican Church of Australia Trust Corporation.

**Garden Prayer:** Adapted from *Prayers of the Cosmos: Meditations on the Aramaic Words of Jesus*, by Neil Douglas-Klotz. HarperOne, 2009.

**Eucharistic Prayer:** Adapted from *Eucharistic Prayers*, Sam Wells and Abby Kocher. Eerdmans, 2016.

**Sending:** Susan McEvoy