

Dear friends in Christ



“It’s the Lipstick”

Rev. Dr. John C. Forney
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Acts 10:44-48; Psalm 98;
1 John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17

Just a handy hint for today -- It’s Mother’s Day again. Gentlemen, Ladies, boys and girls, sons, daughters – whatever your relationship to the most important woman in your lives, remember the flowers. Roses are always good. Remember the call. And don’t forget the card. Women, if you don’t want to be disappointed, go on and remind the one who’s suppose to get the flowers and cook dinner a day or two ahead of time. Often is best.

Moms are priceless. As Homer Simpson says, “You couldn’t fool your mother on the foolingest day of your life if you had an electrified fooling machine.”¹

And keep in mind, “Nothing is truly lost until your Mom can’t find it.”

Having served churches in Alaska, I know the profound truth of Sarah Palin’s quip at the Republican Convention when she was introduced by John McCain. “What’s the difference between a pit bull and a hockey mom? It’s the lipstick.”

¹ Jon Vitti, James L. Brooks, Matt Groening, Sam Simon, *The Simpsons*, Season 4, episode 18, Fox, April 1, 1993.

I've seen some of those moms in action and the level of ferocity is beyond belief if they think their players have been treated unfairly, or the coach didn't play their son when he should have. Brutal.

It's a mama bear protecting her cubs. That remark by the governor of Alaska brought down the house.

The truth of which she spoke captures the fierce love mothers hold for what is nearest and dearest to them. Yes, it's Mothers' Day today.

Remember those early memories, the good times, the jokes, the tender moments. Remember how she sang to you when you were little. I do.

Remember how she believed in you, even when you didn't.

This from John's gospel: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love...This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

The Beatles got it right, "Love is all You Need." Active love. Engaged love.

Our mothers, for the most of us, are the sacramental token of that divine love. They are its shape and power in our lives. Yes, it's ferocity in lipstick.

Unfortunately, some Mothers have been so damaged by their parents, life circumstances or abuse that they are unable to fulfill this role.

"A week before, Cruz Caceres, a single mother from Honduras who won asylum in Tennessee, had gotten another call that upended her already precarious life: Kidnappers in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico had abducted her pregnant sister Tani and Tani's 4-year-old son."² The kidnappers were demanding \$20,000.

That boundless love is Karen Cruz Caceres pleading with a kidnapper for her younger sister, who is only allowed to briefly speak. Tani, "How many days have you gone without food?" without warning the call ends.³

This was just after she and her boy had been summarily expelled from Texas along with a large group of other mothers and children under a Trump-era policy, a policy which continues yet today under President Biden.

³ Molly O'Toole, "Sitting Ducks," Los Angeles Times, May 2, 2021.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Dumped across the border with no thought for their safety or well-being, these women and children are “sitting ducks.” These families are being left in some of the world’s most dangerous cities without belongings and little warning as to what will happen to them -- left to the mercy of kidnappers and other criminals. Relatives in the United States are faced with extortion for their release. No matter that this policy violates both U.S. and international law guaranteeing the right to seek asylum.⁴

Why do these women and their children undertake this perilous journey? It is the same fierce love for their families of that momma grizzly bear has for her cubs.

Marcela Valdes documents the failure of American policy in Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador. In the 60s and 70s the U.S. deported many gang members back to those countries. Local governments, riddled with corruption, became subsidiaries of the criminal activities of these gangs. Drugs, rape, sex trafficking, extortion...all of it exploded. Families feared for their own children being recruited into these gangs or sold to traffickers in the sex trade.

As many as could got the hell out. What’s a mother to do? Such fierce love had no alternative. The journey north was dangerous but the corruption and the gangs were worse. These are the mothers we should be celebrating today, praying for. Not feeding them to criminals like scraps of meat to a ravenous pack of dogs.

Our policy of granting Temporary Protective Status (T.P.S.) to these refugees and others was in line with both international law and humanitarian goals. Even though Kristjen Nielsen, under Trump, ordered the immediate departure of 98 percent of T.P.S. recipients in 2018, conditions in El Salvador and the other countries had not appreciably changed. Thugs, government death squads and transnational gangs still controlled that nation.

As of 2018 over four hundred thousand immigrants had T.P.S. status. Where would they go? As over 270,000 of these people are parents of U.S. citizens, this could turn into the “largest family separation operation in American history.”⁵

⁵ Marcela Valdes, “A Forgotten Promise: The uncertain fate of a 30-old immigration program underscores a dark truth: U.S. foreign policy helped foster the conditions that brought migrants here. What does America owe them?”, *New York Times Magazine*, April 11, 2021.

⁶Op. cit., 26.

One night in January, 2017, soon after Trump had begun announcing the elimination of T.P.S. entry visas, an immigrant mother here with T.P.S. status, from El Salvador, now acutely aware of her own vulnerability, set down to dinner with her children as her husband led the family in evening prayer, asking God to “keep families together.” After the family was sleeping, Christina Morales sat on the couch in the study and wept.

For twenty years, under the T.P.S. program, she had been a taxpaying, homeowning legal resident. Was she to now lose it all just like that?⁶ Perhaps, never see her family again. Fierce love struggled with hopelessness in her breast. O God, keep families together. O God, keep my family together.

This Sunday we should be lifting these courageous mothers in prayer, mothers who have done the best they knew how to do for their families.

America needs to keep its promises – even when inconvenient or politically inexpedient to do so. That must be our Mother’s Day resolve, every bit as fearless as a hockey mom or a pit bull.

My friend Dick Bunce commended another mother to those of us in faith communities last Friday at our interfaith justice and peace group (ICUJP). That is Mother Jones, a fearless labor organizer. I shamelessly copied it here below, with his permission.⁷

As we celebrate our moms, let’s keep Mary Harris Jones, aka Mother Jones, in mind. She never got the memo that women were to be the caretakers, leaving the pioneering to men. This expectation is less prevalent today than over a century ago, but it still applies. Mother Jones was both caretaker and pioneer, especially the latter. And what a pioneer she was.

Let’s reel the film back to the year 1900. We’re in the Gilded Age. This is the era of John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, J.P. Morgan, the rise of the railroads, the telegraph, vast gray factories, and soulless monopolies. On the surface, all is beautiful, but this beauty is built on a mountain of despair: seventy-two-hour work weeks, child labor, sweat shops, slum housing projects,

⁷ Dick Bunce, “The Power of the Powerless: A Salute to Mother Jones,” meditation given to Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace, April 30, 2021.

the lockout and blacklisting of laborers who protested. Many are hired just a few hours or days at a time for backbreaking jobs and are always competing for what little work they can get. Pay is dispensed like so many crumbs swept off the table.

Against this background stands a seventy-year-old woman – gray hair, broad-brimmed black hat, long dress, and mannerly. She knew something about hardship and despair. She had lost her husband and her four children to smallpox. She lived in grinding poverty. Upon immigrating from Ireland, though trained as a school teacher, she could only get work as a seamstress making clothes for the privileged. From this vantage point, she saw and felt the cruelty of the system.

By her middle years, she was an activist who could not be stopped. When she died at age 100, she had logged sixty years as nothing less than a Lion of Judah whose heart was on fire for justice. She often hearkened back to the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. If there was a Moses on the cusp of the labor movement, that person was grandmotherly Mary Harris Jones.

She was creative and inclusive. As a day laborer, while in her early 40's, she formed the Knights of Labor, welcoming women, people of color, immigrants, and all who needed a decent job. However, this fledgling labor organization lost support because a pro-labor demonstration erupted in the violence of the Haymarket Square Incident. Blame was spread randomly, and Knights of Labor could not escape the fall-out from that anarchic day in 1886.

She was slowed only briefly. She waded into mining towns and established a union called the United Mine Workers. She organized mop and broom brigades made up of miners' wives who beat on pans to scare mules away from hauling coal, thus disrupting business as usual. She organized a children's strike around the motto, "We want time to play."

She was a model of perseverance. No gain was enough to justify claiming victory when there was more to do. The authorities threw her in jail, used all means of intimidation, and she would not stop. When she was 72 years old, a federal representative called her "the most dangerous woman in America."

She had a holy anger. She embodied a Hebrew proverb that says in effect, there is a point at which patience is not a virtue. As she was dragged off to jail,

she exposed the industrial giants for what they were. She would say to her cohorts, "Just fight like hell until you get to heaven."

Mother Jones was a woman of passionate faith. She was a Matthew 25 follower of Jesus, with a heart for the "least of these." Whether they were on a picket line, a soup line or in jail. She is another mother I celebrate today. Thank you, Dick, for this. I owe you a beer. You get close to the "Last Word."

Precious, fearless women. In the cause of justice, can get as nasty as a pit bull, or a hockey mom. For them all we say thanks be to God. O Lord, continue to give them Holy Persistence to disrupt the lives of those complacent in the face of injustice. Give us all courage to follow where they lead.

Oh, our deportees, Tani and her son? Upon release by their kidnappers, they were given humanitarian parole and reunited with her husband. Today we celebrate the "undaunted courage" of these women.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." As your mother may have loved you. With the loving ferocity of a pit bull.

Every now and then, we do the right thing. Thanks be to God! Amen.