

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: God's Motherly Love

Lesson: Psalm 23

Today is the Fourth Sunday of Easter. As usual, we will exchange Easter's greeting: Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

And today is also a special day. It's Mother's Day. Today is the day to honor mothers who have left a deep mark on our lives. As a way to honor that, I'd like to take a moment for us to greet one another by saying "Happy Mother's Day!" It's a day to give thanks to all those who have embraced us as biological mothers, stepmothers, grandmothers, aunts, or mother-like figures. Their love is like a lamp that raises us, comforts us, and lights our way.

In the green fields and quiet lakes of Wisconsin, we feel God's touch. Today, the familiar Psalm 23 confesses that God is our shepherd, feeding us when we need it, providing a place to rest, and being with us so that we do not fear even when we pass through dark valleys. This image of God is similar to the love of a mother who embraces us. Mothers first look after their children's needs, quietly extend their hands to help them up every time they stumble on the path of life, and silently stay by their side. The love of God and the love of mothers are gentle yet powerful forces that are the source of our life.

Psalm 23 begins with David's confession, calling God "my shepherd." Today, we want to look at this word anew in light of Mother's Day. God is a shepherd, but at the same time, He is like a mother who embraces us. Keeping this in mind, let's read Psalm 23 again.

Psalm 23 (NIV):

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
 He makes me lie down in green pastures,
 he leads me beside quiet waters,
 he refreshes my soul.
 He guides me along the right paths
 for his name's sake.
 Even though I walk
 through the darkest valley,
 I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;
 your rod and your staff,
 they comfort me.
 You prepare a table before me
 in the presence of my enemies.
 You anoint my head with oil;
 my cup overflows.
 Surely your goodness and love will follow me
 all the days of my life,
 and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
 forever.

This word describes God's love as warm and cozy like a mother's embrace.
 Now, let's think more deeply about the meaning of Mother's Day through this psalm.

In the countryside of Wisconsin, we often see farmers taking care of cows and sheep. They carefully look after their livestock so that they don't go hungry, are safe, and don't get lost. Similarly, mothers fulfill all their children's needs. The first verse of Psalm 23, "I shall not want," reminds us of how mothers generously provide food, clothing, and love to their children.

(Slide 1) Think about it. Your mother probably prepared warm meals when you were hungry and made sure you had thick coats for cold winters. A few weeks ago, in my son's class, the homework was to find out their mothers' recipes, and the class made a Mother's Day Cookbook to distribute to the class. It was interesting to read—because it included not only the kids' favorite recipes from their moms, but also little introductions they wrote about their mothers from their own perspective.

Since coming to the U.S., my mother's recipes have become very important to me. When I was with my parents in Korea, I never wondered what my mom was making because I thought I could always eat her food. But since coming to America, there are days when I miss the taste of my mom's cooking. I'm not sure if you are familiar with curry. But my mother used to make curry with pork, potatoes, carrots, and onions, and that was my favorite. Sometimes I miss it and try to make it, but it doesn't taste like my mom's. So,

I asked my mom for the curry recipe and other dishes I liked, and I have them saved on my phone. What was your favorite dish that your mother made, and what was the recipe? Our sense of taste and smell is really amazing—just one bite or smell of a mother's dish can bring us right back to our childhood.

Psalm 23 continues, "He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters." One of the privileges of living in Wisconsin is that we have green fields and lakes nearby. Therefore, we can easily imagine green pastures and peaceful lakes. These are places of peace and rest. A mother's embrace is the same. When we are tired, hurt, or afraid, mothers hold us and give us their side.

In the Bible, Jesus said, "How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings" (Matthew 23:37). This motherly image shows how warm and protective God's love is. The mothers in our church practice this love every day. They comfort their children, help their neighbors, and make our community warmer.

There are dark moments in life. Psalm 23 says, "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." Mothers also stay by their children's side when they are sick, lost, or hurt. When I was little, I felt more at ease and secure when my mother was by my side when I was sick. Mothers' presence and prayers are a strength and comfort to their children.

Psalm 23 says, "my cup overflows," describing God's abundant blessings. Think about the harvest season in Wisconsin. Farmers work hard, and as a result, their barns are filled with grain. A mother's love is also like this; it overflows. They give their children more than they need, sometimes sacrificing themselves. The reason we are here today is because of our mothers' dedication and sacrifice.

(Slide 2) There is a Korean song called "Family Portrait," and since there is an English translation, I want to share a part of the lyrics with you:

*As my youthful days began to fade,
I finally came to see the days you had lived.
In an old family photo, my young mother smiled,*

*In the days when your life was in full bloom.
 To help me blossom,
 You became the soil, the sacrifice, the sun-scorched time.
 I'll gather every piece of those withered moments
 To let your smile bloom once more.*

Finally, Psalm 23 ends with "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." This is the promise that God's love continues beyond our lifetime into eternity. A mother's love also follows her children's entire life. Our faith tradition deeply understands this eternal hope. Mother's Day is not just a day to celebrate the present but a day to look forward to the future where we will rest forever in God's embrace.

Mother's Day is a day of joy, but it may not be easy for everyone. Some may be grieving the loss of their mothers, while others may have complicated relationships with their mothers. Today, let's bring all our emotions to God just as they are, without pretense. God's love embraces both our joys and sorrows and comforts us.

Psalm 23 beautifully shows God's motherly love. God cares for us, guides us, protects us, and is with us forever. Like the shepherds leading sheep in Wisconsin's fields, the mothers in our church lead us with love and dedication. Today, let's give thanks to them and pray that God blesses them.

Now, let's also reflect God's love in our lives. Like mothers, let's embrace our neighbors, serve our community, and share God's grace. To all of you, have a happy Mother's Day!