

*Order of Service –May 14, 2017
Mother's Day
As a Hen Gathers Her Brood*

Musical Prelude

Greeting -- The Mother's Day Proclamation, Julia Ward Howe

1st Hymn: For the Beauty of the Earth, Green 10

Readings -- Luke 13:34; Love's Lullaby, by Hanna Hurr

2nd Hymn A Song of Peace, Green 304

Joys and Concerns

Musical interlude

Prayer -- A prayer for Peace.

3rd Hymn: The Lone, Wild Bird, Green 240

Message: "Mommy is the Best Girl"

Silent worship

4th Hymn: Peace in Our Time, O Lord, Green 303

Closing --As a Hen Gathers Her Brood.

Introductions/Announcements/Afterthoughts

Postlude

Greeting: Good morning Friends, and Happy Mother's Day. The Religious Society of Friends is known as an historic peace churches. Our peace testimony -- our commitment to nonviolence as followers of Jesus -- was born in A Declaration to Charles II, written in 1660. A little more than two centuries later, Julia Ward Howe who was an abolitionist, but not a Quaker, wrote her pacifist "Appeal to womanhood throughout the world" which later came to be known as the "Mother's Day Proclamation." On this Mother's Day, I'd like to begin with an excerpt. She wrote:

Again, in the sight of the Christian world, have the skill and power of two great nations exhausted themselves in mutual murder. Again have the sacred questions of international justice been committed to the fatal mediation of military weapons. In this day of progress, in this century of light, the ambition of rulers has been allowed to barter the dear interests of domestic life for the bloody exchanges of the battle field. ...the mother has a sacred and commanding word to say to the sons who owe their life to her suffering. That word should now be heard, and answered to as never before. Arise, then, Christian women of this day ! Arise, all women who have hearts, Whether your baptism be that of water or of tears ! Say firmly : We will not have great questions decided by irrelevant agencies. Our husbands shall not come to us, reeking with carnage, for caresses and applause. Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy and patience. We, women of one country, will be too tender of those of another country, to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs. From the bosom of the devastated earth a voice goes up with our own. It says: Disarm, disarm! The sword of murder is not the balance of justice. Blood does not wipe out dishonor, nor violence vindicate possession. ...let women now leave all that may be left of home for a great and earnest day of council....with each other as to the means whereby the great human family can live in peace... each (member) bearing...the sacred impress, not of Caesar, but of God.

In honor of all that bears the sacred impress of God, let us sing our first hymn together, **Green 10, For the Beauty of the Earth -- change Lord to LOVE!**

Readings

In 1651, George Fox wrote, after being called to testify before the authorities: “*I told [the Commonwealth Commissioners] I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars... I told them I was come into the covenant of peace which was before wars and strife were.*”

Luke 13:34 Matt. 23:37 Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings...!

Hanna Hurr: "Love's Lullaby"

*A mother cradles her child against her thin breast
And gazes sadly into deep shining eyes, a mirror of her own /The infant cries,
wanting milk/ But there is none to give/ The woman has not eaten in days
And her breasts are dry as the bone-cracked land that surrounds them
She whispers into his ear /A single word Peace
Suddenly the stars rearrange /Painting perfect patterns in the inky sky
All around the world, cities fall silent /Apologizing for their constant
pandemonium / Mothers look at the sky, listen to the stars, and whisper
Vrede / Hetep / Rauha / Irini / Heiwa / Soksang / Rongo / Amani
Santiphap / Ukuthula / Shalom / Salaam / Peace The word flows from mother to
child / Cracked lips to soft ears / The newborns remember without understanding /
Years later, as the world writhes in war The word ricochets in the grown
children's minds / and they drop their weapons / Silent, thoughtful. They turn their
heads to the sky, and again, the stars sing*

Second Hymn: A Song of Peace, Green 304

Prayer

*Oh God of All the Nations, Love of all, we pray today for peace. All around us
flowers bloom, leaves unfurl, life in our land is green and growing and we lift a*

prayer of grateful praise for these miracles, these gifts of unearned grace. And we know other people in other lands also gather in thanksgiving and praise, we know they too lift their faces and hands to the sky and pray for peace. We know all over the world people kneel, and bow, and touch the earth, ground of our being. Oh God who is Father and Mother, One who Holds All the Prayers, help your people. That we may live in that life and power, so present all around us in your good earth and sky and sea, that power that takes away the occasion of all wars...That we may yet come into the covenant of peace which is before wars and strife are. Gather us under your wing, Mother of All, Hold us in your arms. Whisper your word to us today. Peace in our time, Oh Holy One, let it be so. Let it be so. We pray together today, for peace. For all of your people, peace.

Benediction

*As a Hen gathers her unruly brood under the refuge of her wings,
We too, are come into that covenant of peace
We too are held in the life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars.
And so, Arise, then, all women and men who have hearts! Sound a nobler call!
Speak firmly that sacred and commanding word
Shalom, Salaam, Peace.*

Message

When he was six, I found two scraps of paper from a yellow legal pad on which my son Cyrus had written “Mommy Is The Best Girl” and “Mommy: Nice Sweet Caring Girl Ever.”

Cyrus is already past the point of practicing his writing by laboring over words of adoration for his Mommy. But these writings, which I framed, made me think about the way that the modern Mother’s Day acknowledges this kind of deep and guileless impulse to honor mothers and mothering. Beyond the commercialism and the excuse to sell and buy stuff, there is still this call of the mother archetype that echoes to us through our faith traditions and our searches for meaning. For thousands of years, our prevailing symbols of the Sacred evoked both Father and Mother. But over the last 2000 years -- particularly in the amped up patriarchal and extractive economies of the last 500 years -- our notions of God have become less feminine, less Mother, and more Father. The dominant theological narrative in the Christian tradition has privileged notions of God as the Father, All-Powerful, AlMighty, Lord and King. And in this culture, now exported to the very edges of the earth and beyond, the orthodox ideas of and symbols for what we call God, for what we understand to be most Holy, and what we deem most Sacred, do not generally celebrate or laud the deep and ancient archetype of mother, to which we humans offered, for many thousands of years, our awe, our gratitude, our sense of beholden-ness, our need, our vulnerability, our longing to be taken care of, to be safe, to be loved unconditionally, and to be held with tenderness. For millennia our almost universal expressions of worship to this principle of divine nurturing was very much like children offering up in utter sincerity and love, our belief that our Mommy was the very best girl. We are used to hearing God referred to as a Father, but in Isaiah and in Numbers, God is also a nursing mother. In Psalm 22 God is a midwife (Psalm 22:8-10). Birthing imagery is all over the Bible. Again in Isaiah, God is one who gives birth (Isaiah 42:14). "like a woman in labor I will moan; I will pant, I will gasp," he says, in order to give birth to his people. The labor continues in the Second Testament, where God is the experience or process that delivers people into new life. And Like birth imagery, the bible is also replete with images of birds. God lifts the Israelites on her wings and shelters humanity under them. God’s spirit is a white dove in Genesis. These images would have been evocative in the ancient near East and Mediterranean world, because the

dove was an iconic symbol of the mother goddess. doves represented feminine fertility and procreation, and came to be well-recognized symbols of the Canaanite goddess Asherah and her counterpart Astarte. In Rome and throughout the Empire, goddesses such as Venus and Fortunata could be seen depicted in statues with a dove resting in their hands or on their heads.

For bird symbolism, though, The Roman Empire really exalted the eagle--a strong and powerful predator. The eagle was the standard that went before Roman legions, the rallying emblem for infantry soldiers, signifying imperial rule. And then Jesus came along and both the gospels according to Luke and Matthew have him comparing himself to a chicken. I know from my experience keeping backyard chickens that it's hard to come up with an animal that less evokes imperial might than a chicken. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem," he clucks, "you who kill the prophets and stone those who were sent to you! How often I have wanted to gather your people just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings." Given the relative inability of chickens to protect themselves from predators, this is an image that expresses a rather shocking and somewhat undignified vulnerability. Hens *can* be fierce, and put up a good fight, using all the instinct they can muster, but as mighty as their fight may be, **they** are not mighty. They are not all powerful. They are certainly not at the top of the food chain.

In Jesus' time, as in our own, this metaphor would not have been an image employed to rally the troops or to whip up patriotic fervor. No, these lines carry something else, some other story, about tenderness, about fragility even, and gentleness, maybe even about being on the losing side, at the bottom of the food chain where your mother's love is all you've got going for you. in the space of one sentence in this scripture, repeated in two gospels, a mob stoning prophets becomes unruly chicks taking refuge under a mama's wing, and the capacity to harm becomes a need to be protected by a mother who herself doesn't have much in the way of protection to offer, except her own warm and relatively defenseless body.

But my sons are growing up in a world that worships the almighty. If not in the form of a powerful, all-knowing Deity, then just power itself. Power that is defined by its capacity to control, to exert agency over others, and to inflict or

threaten harm in the pursuit of its agenda. It's hard to argue with that kind of power. Hard to plead pacifism. You end up looking like.... a chicken. Like....Jesus. A chicken like Jesus. Jesus as a mother hen wielding a protective kind of power that seems defenseless, dismissable, even silly. And yet: I've seen hens when they are broody. There is such dedication there, such attention to the task at hand, such acceptance of the charge, such generous willingness to die if necessary, to protect the ones given unto her care. Such unself-conscious, unselfish, instinctive bravery. Something very much like love. Under the protective wings of Christ the Mother, you can imagine there just might be a six year old boy laboriously scratching out the adoring words "Mommy is the Best Girl." Or in this one place of safety in a perilous world, there might be newborn babies hearing without understanding all the words for peace in all the languages of the world. and maybe, years later, as the world writhes again in war, these cherished children, given tenderness in the least tender of circumstances, will remember their mothers, their sacred and commanding word, and the weapons *will* drop from their hands. Maybe then, it is possible, The stars will rearrange, and the cities will fall silent. and we will all be gathered into safe keeping. Perhaps there, in The Mother's arms, under the Christ mother's wing, is where we first come to live *in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all war, to come into that covenant of peace which was before wars and strife. Perhaps it's there that we learn charity, mercy, and patience, where we have our first inkling that we too bear the Sacred impress of God.* Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings...!