

Evotional – 11 August 2013 – God the Mother

'For me to appear to you as a woman ... is simply to keep you from falling so easily back into your religious conditioning' (The Shack)

'If you could understand it, it would not be God' (Augustine of Hippo)

What does the Bible say about God as Mother?

1. God does not have a gender

He is neither male nor female (or perhaps both male and female). The classic text is Genesis 1:26-27. See also Deuteronomy 4:15-16; having an image (even a mental image?) of God as man or woman is idolatry. So neither men nor women are any more or less in his image.

2. God is like a mother

There are examples of God being like a mother:

- God gives birth (Deuteronomy 32:18)
- God cradles (Psalm 131:2)
- God has compassion (Isaiah 49:15)
- God comforts (Isaiah 66:13)
- God gives new birth (Isaiah 42:14)
- God is like a mother animal (Matthew 23:37)

3. God is not called Mother

He is never addressed as Mother. All the above examples are metaphors, similes, analogies. Not titles. God is 'like' a mother. He is also sometimes described as like a rock, a fortress, a hen, a bear, a hiding place, a friend, Whereas Jesus taught that God was his Father, addressed him as Father and encouraged us to do the same (eg in the Lord's Prayer). God the Father is one of the distinctive things Jesus revealed and the Holy Spirit reveals to us (see Galatians 4:6b-7a).

What does this mean for us today?

1. Mothers display the image of God; they can show us God; they may be best placed to introduce us to God; for some people, they may be the best human image of God they have. But we need to be careful about images of God; Jesus is the best image of God, not because he is male, but because he is the incarnate Son of God.
2. Calling God 'Mother' is tricky; he does not primarily reveal himself as Mother and in the Bible if you 'name' someone or something you exercise authority over it. In the Bible people don't have a right to call God whatever they want. So there is a danger that calling him Mother is making a god in our own image or according to our own preference.
BUT: Calling God mother may be a place to start, eg if we have a bad experience of a father. Also, people sometimes get the impression that God/the church hates women, and the NT encourages us to think that normally God wants us to communicate his grace rather than putting stumbling blocks in the way of people who don't know him.
AND: I think that all of us can call God Mother occasionally. If we can address him as 'rock of ages' or anchor, potter, consuming fire, closest friend, etc, then why not as mother?
3. God is, and wants to be, like a mother to us. Look at John 3:1-16. If God is like a mother, how much he must love us that he gave his only son for us – can you imagine any other mother who would do that? He loves us passionately and compassionately; he is endlessly interested in us; he sacrifices himself for us; he is obsessed with our welfare; he always has time for us; if he were a person he would lie awake worrying about us! He wants us to be reborn as his children; and ultimately it is more important for us to have experienced this rebirth than to try to achieve a perfect understanding of his nature.

Questions:

1. Do you tend to think of God as male? Is that a problem?
2. In what way has God been like a mother to you?
3. Do you think it is OK to address God as Mother occasionally?
4. What does John 3:1-16 reveal about God's motherhood and our response?

Prayer:

Our dear God, you care for us, protect us and comfort us like a mother. We thank you for your passionate love and devotion to us, which are so great that you even sacrificed that which was most precious to you. Help us to trust you even more than we have trusted our earthly mothers. Help us to seek your care, protection and comfort. We worship you, and turn to you. We believe that, just as you gave us physical life, so you give us new birth into eternal life with you. We come to you for that new, abundant, heavenly life today. Amen.

And finally:

This is a difficult topic and so there will be a range of opinions. If you have theological issues, or (even more importantly) personal or emotional issues about motherhood, please feel free to speak to one of the Ministers or anyone else you trust at BGBC.