

## You Were Never Alone

There is a photograph on the screens.

taken in a hospital room.

a mother... just hours after surgery... weak and exhausted...

holding her newborn daughter. Her eyes are barely open.

But her arms are locked around that baby

like nothing in the world could pry them apart.

Nurses said... she refused to let go... even to sleep.

When asked about it later, she said:

***“I just needed her to know she wasn’t alone.”***

That’s what a mother does.

Before a child can form a single word,

before they understand love... or safety... or God...

a mother’s arms say:

***You are not alone. You are known. You are held.***

And today... on *this* Mother’s Day...

We have four bible passages before us

***whispering exactly the same thing.***

Not just about the mothers in our lives,

***but about the God who invented mothering in the first place.***

In the first reading from Acts, Paul is in Athens  
surrounded by altars to gods... carved from marble...  
gods with cold eyes... and no heartbeat...  
and he offers something radical:

*“From one ancestor...*

*he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth...*

*so that they would search for God*

*and perhaps grope for him and find him —*

*though indeed he is not far from each one of us.*

*For in him we live and move and have our being.”*

In him... we live... and move... and have our being.

Not *beside* him. Not *under* him. ***In him.***

Think about what that means for a moment.

Think about the most intimate space you have ever occupied...

curled up safe as a child... held in arms that ***loved you completely.***

Paul says... ***God is closer than that.***

We don't have to *search the skies* for a *distant deity.*

We exist... *inside* the very ***breath of God.***

A mother... whose son... struggled with addiction... for years.

Every night... she would lie awake... listening...

*Not doing anything.*

Just... **present**. Awake... while he slept.

Nearby... when he didn't know... *she was nearby.*

***"I just needed to be close," she said.***

***"Even when he couldn't feel it."***

That is *who God is*. The God ***who is not far***.

The God who is ***awake in the dark***.

The God who is ***near... even... when we can't feel it***.

**Psalm 66** is written from a place of pressure  
of being tested... of passing through fire and water.

And yet... and this is the turn that takes your breath away... he says:

***"But you have kept us among the living... Truly God has  
listened; he has given heed to the words of my prayer."***

He has listened. He has given heed.

There is something about a mother's ears that is unlike any other.

Scientists have studied it.

A mother can identify her own child's cry  
in a room full of crying children.

The sound is encoded somewhere deep in her.

She hears what others cannot.

*I remember a woman telling me*

about the night her teenage daughter... called from a party...

voice steady... saying *everything is fine*.

She said...

*I knew immediately.*

*I could hear it wasn't fine.*

*I heard it in one word.*

She drove *across town at midnight*. Her daughter *was not fine*.

But... *she wasn't alone*.

Because her mother's ear... was tuned to a frequency...

Dialed in... by *love*.

The Psalm says... *God has that kind of ear*.

He doesn't hear us the way a stranger hears

processing syllables... deciding whether to respond... or not.

*He hears us the way a mother hears...*

*Already moving before the sentence is finished.*

*Already on the way.*

In today's Epistle reading,

Peter writes to people that are suffering greatly...

for doing what is right.

And instead of explaining why God allows suffering...

instead of offering theological drivel

he points them directly to Jesus...

who suffered unjustly...

who died...

who descended into the depths...

who rose from the dead.

***“For Christ also suffered for sins once for all,  
the righteous for the unrighteous,  
in order to bring you to God.”***

Not to *explain suffering... from a safe distance.*

Rather... to fully *enter* it.

To go *all the way down* into it.

To *carry it* from the inside.

Every mother here today  
knows what it means... to *carry pain... that isn't yours.*  
To feel your child's fever... *in your own chest.*  
To lose sleep over a heartbreak... *you can't fix.*  
To sit in a waiting room and wish... *with everything in you...  
that you could trade places.*

An elderly grandmother... said...  
The hardest moment of her life...  
Wasn't her own cancer diagnosis.  
It was the day her seven-year-old son... was hit by a car.  
She wasn't there... when it happened.  
When she arrived at the hospital...  
He was already stitched up and sedated...  
Already past the worst of it.  
***"But I needed to hurt with him,"*** she said  
tears streaming down her eighty-two-year-old cheeks.  
***"I needed him to know...  
his pain mattered enough...  
to break me too."***

Peter said... *that is exactly what God did.*

*He did not watch from above.*

*He came down.*

*He let it break him.*

*He suffered... not beside us...*

but *for us* and *with us*...

to bring us *all the way home.*

And now we arrive at the gospel

and what may be the most tender promise Jesus ever made.

***“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.”***

I will not leave you orphaned.

Jesus said this the night before he died.

He prepared his disciples for something

They could not yet comprehend

his absence... his death... the overwhelming silence of Holy Saturday.

And in the middle of that preparation, he stopped, and said:

***You will not be left without a parent.***

***You will not be abandoned.***

***I am coming back.***

The word orphaned in Greek is orphanos.

It means *bereft*.

*Stripped* of the one who holds you.

There is a particular kind of grief  
that belongs to people who have lost their mothers.

It is not like other grief.

It is the grief *of lost origin...*

of the one person... who knew you... before you knew yourself...  
who held you... before the world could touch you...

And when that person is gone... *something in the universe shifts*.

A man in his sixties... who had just lost his mother at ninety-one.  
was embarrassed about how hard he was crying.

*She was ninety-one. I should be okay.*

But you see...

*There is no age at which it stops mattering.*

*Because what you're grieving isn't just a person.*

*You're grieving...*

*the loss of being completely and unconditionally known.*

Jesus says:

*I will not leave you with that grief.*

*I am coming.*

*The Spirit of truth will be in you.*

*You will not be orphaned.*

This is the promise inside every Mother's Day.

Not just a celebration of the women who raised us

but a reminder...

that the love they gave us

is a reflection of a love

that does not end.

Behind every mother's arms

is the God who created arms for exactly this purpose:

to hold... to protect... to say...

*You are not alone.*

Four passages. Four portraits... of the *same* God.

The God of Acts 17

who is never far

who is the very atmosphere

in which we breathe... and move... and thrive.

The God of Psalm 66

who hears the prayer we haven't finished praying

who is already listening before we find the words.

The God of 1 Peter

who did not explain suffering from a throne...

but *entered* it, *carried* it, and *brought us through it*.

The God of John 14

who looked at his beloved and frightened brothers... and said:

*I will not leave you orphaned. I am coming for you.*

That is not a *distant God*.

That is not a *celestial bureaucrat stamping prayers*

and then filing them away.

That is a God who *mothers us...*

Who *knew us before* we were born

Who *counts the hairs on our heads*

Who *runs down the road* to meet us

*Even when we are still a long way off.*

On this Mother's Day...

we honor the women...

who showed us what that love looks like...

with skin on.

Who sat up in the night.

Who heard what no one else could hear.

Who hurt when we hurt.

Who refused... *absolutely refused... to let us be alone.*

We remember

that they learned to love that way

because they were made in the image of God...

The God who loved you that way... *first.*

You were never alone.

You are not alone now.

And you never will be.

Amen.