John 15:9-17

9As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.10If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.**11I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.**

12 ‘This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.13No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.14You are my friends if you do what I command you.15I do not call you servants\* any longer, because the servant\* does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.16You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.17I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

What God and Mom have in common.

Jesus tells us that in his Father’s house there are many rooms, and that we will dwell there some day. Have you ever wondered if you have to clean that room? Do you have to eat all your vegetables in heaven or wash your dirty dishes? I think you probably will, because God and a mother have a lot in common. The Bible even makes the comparison, describing God with a mother (Hosea 13:8, Deuteronomy 32:11-12, Deuteronomy 32:18, Isaiah 66:13, Psalm131:2). And depending on who your mother is, you may find that she and God have a lot in common.

In fact, it could very well be that it was part of God’s plan to use mothers to teach their children a thing or two about God, in particular his kind of love. I say his kind of love because ‘love’ is a word that is over-applied in our culture. The kind of love we celebrate on Valentine’s Day is usually a sentimental love that has more to do with our hormones than our heart. People often tell someone “I love you” when all they mean is “I love the way you make me feel when I’m around you.” That’s not the way I felt about my mother, but I can say that her love was of a higher quality than that of a teenage heart throb. So let’s look at what God’s love and a mother’s love have in common.

1. God’s love and Mom’s love involve sacrifice.

From the minute a woman finds out that she’s expecting, she knows that there will be pain unlike any she has ever known. After months of morning sickness and emotional volatility, she will endure labor pain and delivery pain. And that’s only the beginning. She will experience sleep deprivation. She will have backaches from carrying around a young child. She will become well acquainted with the smell and consistency of your stool samples, which she will confront quite regularly. She will have the food that she prepared rejected, yeah thrown onto the floor! What else? She will endure your public tantrums. She will give and give and give and not ask for a thing in return. Beginning to sound like God? How often in the Old Testament is Israel described as a wayward and delinquent child, but a child who God never abandons. How many times as a child did you break the rules, take advantage of your mother’s kindness and generosity and patience? But did she ever kick you out? Did she ever disown you? No. In this way, God and our mothers are alike.

1. God’s love and Mom’s love expect our best.

There’s another way as well, another aspect of God’s love that a mother communicates to her children. While she communicates unconditional acceptance, she also *raises* you. What does that mean? It means that she sometimes nags you. I mean that she helps you to grow up, and she is concerned about your spiritual growth. What do I mean by spiritual growth? I mean you development into the person God intends you to be. We usually can sense that this kind of instruction is going on when your mother refers to you no longer by a one syllable name but insists on addressing you with full first, middle, and last name. When she’s not cold but folds her arms in front of her. What else? This is what may be referred to as the wrath of Mom. It’s Mom’s recognition that you’re not doing as well as she expects you to do. I don’t mean academically, because people are born with intellectual abilities. But if you are doing something that fails to show love or care for another person, mom will call you on it, much as God would punish Israel when she failed to care for her widows and orphans, or failed to welcome the stranger, or failed to feed the hungry or in other ways obey God. Mom and God share the same hope for you – they know what you can be as a person, and when you fail to live up to your abilities with regard to love, we sense a conflict, a discomfort.

Perfect love begets joy

We get irritated with Mom the same way we get irritated with God. We criticize bother for interfering with our pleasure. But both God and Mom know all the pleasure in the world will never bring you true joy. They know that you will never find true joy in life unless you are working toward that potential, the person that God and mom expect you to be. Some people don’t get this. For some, life is all about position, status, power, wealth, title. In other words, it’s about you. But these things shouldn’t matter to a mother – they certainly don’t matter to God. What matters is your capacity to love. You may never be a brain surgeon or a rocket scientist, but if you can truly love others, you are a success in God’s eyes and in Mom’s eyes.

What determines your success in life is your capacity to love. And when you are perfected in love, your joy is complete. Only a person who is able to love is able to find joy. That’s what Jesus meant when he said, “I have said these things to you in order that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.” Christ wants us to abide in him – in other words, love him – in order that his joy may be in us. He receives joy from abiding in the Father. And this is all that a mother really wants for her child – that his or her joy may be complete. We don’t have to live in the best neighborhood or have the best job of be the best at anything, but if we know how to love, if we share that love with others, we can find joy.

So Happy Mother’s Day, and thank you. Thank you moms for giving without expecting to receive, and never giving up on your children. Thank you for showing us the way to true joy and to God’s kingdom.