

“Motherhood in Many Creations”

John 16:1-3; 12-16

May 9, 2021

Mother’s Day

“I’ve told you these things to prepare you for rough times ahead. They are going to throw you out of the meeting places. There will even come a time when anyone who kills you will think he’s doing God a favor. They will do these things because they never really understood the Father. I’ve told you these things so that when the time comes and they start in on you, you’ll be well-warned and ready for them.

“I still have many things to tell you, but you can’t handle them now. But when the Friend comes, the Spirit of the Truth, he will take you by the hand and guide you into all the truth there is. He won’t draw attention to himself, but will make sense out of what is about to happen and, indeed, out of all that I have done and said. He will honor me; he will take from me and deliver it to you. Everything the Father has is also mine. That is why I’ve said, ‘He takes from me and delivers to you.’

“In a day or so you’re not going to see me, but then in another day or so you will see me.”

Here ends the reading. May God bless these words as we seek to apply them to our lives.

Film Reference: *Chocolat*

Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=692h0Jq1KJE>

Welcome to the 2021 Spring-Summer Film Series at UCCPH! Beginning this week, I will be showing selected movies on Friday nights (6:00 pm) and preaching Sunday mornings using those films in my sermons. Whether you join in on Fridays to watch the films on Zoom or you watch them on your own, I heartily recommend you follow along on the schedule—you’ll get far more out of the sermons if you do. All of the movies I have selected are available on a variety of streaming services. So, let’s begin, with the film, *Chocolat*, a Lasse Hallström creation from the year 2000.

When mysterious Vianne Rocher and her child arrive in a tranquil French town in the winter of 1959, no one could have imagined the impact that she and her spirited daughter would have on the community stubbornly rooted in religious tradition. Within days, she opens an unusual chocolate shop, across the square from the Catholic church. Her ability to perceive the customer’s longings and satisfy them with just the perfect confection, coaxes the villagers to abandon themselves to temptation—just as Lent begins.

This film is rich with topics for reflection and discussion, but seeing-how it is Mother's Day, let's look at today's scripture in light of three Mother-Child relationships developed in the movie: (1) the relationship between Vianne and her daughter, Anouck; (2) the relationship between Christine and her son, Luc; and (3) the relationship between Armande and her daughter, Christine.

(1)

In much the same way Jesus was misunderstood and perceived a threat to tradition, Vianne is immediately labeled and othered as an outsider who has upset the religious tradition of the village. Jesus warned his disciples that they would go places where they would not be welcomed for no other reason than that they did not go along with the Pharisees, stay silent as to their convictions, and follow religious tradition. Jesus says to them, "There will even come a time when anyone who kills you will think he's doing God a favor. They will do these things because they never really understood God."

The people of the Village Lasquenet have been carefully led by their Mayor, Comte Paul Renaud, to believe that the season of Lent is about suffering. He guides—actually he over-functions in guiding—the brand new, very young priest of the village's Catholic church, even going so far as to edit his sermons. Like the Pharisees of Jesus' day, Renaud has a stranglehold on the church and with it, the attitudes, prejudices, and judgments of the entire village. As the story's narrator tells us, "If you lived in this village, you knew what was expected of you." He misidentifies his own righteousness with God's own will. No upstart outsider woman who does not attend mass or fall in line with his pronouncements will be allowed to flourish under his watch.

Vianne Rocher is curious and she has a dark, mysterious history. We get the sense that she is blown from city to town to village by an insistent North wind that

she believes is conjured by her deceased mother's spirit. The wind carries her mother's voice telling her to move, to ever move, and keep alive the long heritage of the outsider, never putting down roots. As she relocates from place to place with her young daughter Anouck, she carries in a Mayan jar her mother's ashes along, too. The child is devoted to her mother and tries to keep a positive attitude that maybe *this* new place will be their forever home, but she is a victim of her mother's dutiful obedience to the changing winds. As a response to never staying long enough anywhere to make friends,

Anouck has conjured a friend to accompany her—an imaginary kangaroo.

We feel badly for Anouck, for she is an unintended victim of the marginalization imposed upon her mother. The talk about her starts early on—“I heard she is a radical!” “I heard she is an unwed mother.” Some boys repeat what they have heard—that she is an atheist, though they don't know what that means. Vianne and Anouck will have no friends in Lasquenet if the Comte has his way. As he says to the priest, “We cannot force them to leave but we can help them to understand they are not welcome.”

This is akin to the way the disciples are outcast simply due to their association with Jesus, to the Pharisees another curious, mysterious figure come to upset their tried-and-true ways of mediating the world and their religious traditions. And like Jesus, who dismisses the disciple's protests and worries with his “that's just how it is” speech to them, Vianne seems to also minimize the social and emotional needs of her child.

(2)

In Lasquenet, there lives a youngish widow by the name of Christine. Christine is very proper and very cautious, so afraid that her young son, Luc, will fall prey to disease or disaster that she shelters him to the point of suffocation. One of the

relationships she smothers is that of her son and his grandmother-- her mother. Not approving of the grandmother's carefree lifestyle, Christine forbids Luc from seeing her, a situation that is heartbreaking for both grandmother and grandson. Though Christine thinks she is a mother protecting her vulnerable child, we observed her to be grieving her losses by holding her son so tightly to her chest that he can't breathe.

In a way, this is why Jesus is constantly telling his disciples that he must leave them so that they can learn to breathe on their own. He senses that they don't want to leave his protective custody, that they are not ready to grow up in the faith and go out on their own. Jesus has his doubts, too, but like all parents, we must eventually let go and let our children make their own way, their own mistakes, and their own relationships.

Christine is a mother, like Vianne, that is so caught up in her own story of grief that she can't see what is best for her child. These two mothers display for us both their struggles and their intense love for their children.

(3)

And then, there is the fractured relationship between adult mother and adult child that is all too familiar to us as grown-ups ourselves. While we love – deeply and intensely love—those relations of ours in the generations up and down from us, they can make us absolutely crazy. How many mother-child relationships have been strained by stepparents disapproved by a child, marriage partners of the child disapproved by the mother, and choices both make that are not honored by the other? We probably have some of these stories within our own family histories and systems—I know I do.

We have stories in the gospels of Mother Mary disapproving of the actions of her son, Jesus. When she and Joseph take him to the temple for his first Passover, he tarries behind and his panicked mother fears for his safety. Upon finding him, she

scolds him, but he is unimpressed. In his mind he was not lost at all, for he was spending time in God's house and his mother need not worry after him. (Luke 2:41-52) He lives with her another 18 years or so and then sets out to meet his destiny. When Mary hears reports of how he is dangerously challenging the Pharisees, she sends family members to take charge of him for they fear, "He is out of his mind." Mark 3:21.

Jesus does not accede to his mother's insistence that he back off of his public ministry. As much as he might wish to honor his mother's request, he is driven by a calling that transcends family. He is his mother's son, but he is God's son, too—whether you accept that factually or metaphorically—and God has called him to leave his other relationships behind in full devotion to his ministry and destiny. This calling he must heed even at the risk of offending his mother.

On the cross, Jesus sees his mother crying for him, inconsolable. The mother-child bond can be supernaturally strong; for Mary and her son, Jesus, it was. And for Christine and her salty mother Armande, brilliantly characterized by Dame Judi Dench, that bond is very, very strong even as it is very, very strained by their contest of wills.

Motherhood knows many patterns, many creations. Your own mother relationships have, no doubt, many kaleidoscopic aspects to them. I like that Jesus has a real relationship with his mother, bonded no doubt in love and mutual devotion, but also fraught with difficulties and misunderstandings. As Pere Henri says in his Easter sermon:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SqaYn7W7IOg>

I'm not sure what the theme of my homily today ought to be. Do I want to speak of the miracle of our Lord's divine transformation? Not really, no. I don't want to talk about his divinity; I'd rather talk about his humanity, I mean, you know, how he lived his life on earth-- his kindness, his tolerance.

We must measure our goodness, not by what we don't do, what we deny ourselves, what we resist, or who we exclude. Instead, we should measure ourselves by what we embrace, what we create, and who we include.

Jesus tells his disciples and through them, tells us:

...when the Friend comes, the Spirit of the Truth, he will take you by the hand and guide you into all the truth there is. He won't draw attention to himself, but will make sense out of what is about to happen and, indeed, out of all that I have done and said.

We learn about God's love for us through the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through our lives, in and through our relationships, and in and through our most difficult life stories. This Mother's Day, we celebrate that most basic of relationships—that of every mother and every child. Whether you ever knew her, knew her so well, loved her or hated her, you had a mother and she had you—it was a human connection and it had many, many patterns and rhythms. The same is true if you have ever been a mother or a grandmother. The stories of *Chocolat* are a reflection of these deeply intense and personal connections. And as Pere Henri reminds us, we should measure the goodness of our most primal relationships not by what we do or don't do, but by what values we embrace—what we create and who we include.

Mother Earth, the mother of us all, calls to us all to come join her in the festival of life, of love, and of endless creation. We can learn much about what our human relationships with our human relations should be by watching how nature tends to her children and how her children honor their mother.

May It Be So.

Donations to our church gratefully accepted:

<https://www.uccparkerhilltop.org/giving/>

or text your donation to
844-901-3051

Or "Write that Check!" to UCCPH
and mail to:

Don Wick, Financial Sec'y
5011 Buttercup Dr.
Castle Rock, CO. 80109