



FAITH MOTHERS

By Marilyn Sharpe

It's May. It's Mother's Day. Pink and flowered cards are in the rack. Advertising supplements in the Sunday newspaper target gifts for mothers. Reservations for brunch abound.

So, what are we celebrating? That seems like a fatuous question. Moms, of course. But is that who you will be celebrating this Mother's Day? And what about the women who never lived with children? Is this a day of hurt and exclusion for them? I hope not. Some of us have been blessed to be shaped by many, many faith mothers. Let's celebrate all of them!

This and every Mother's Day, I celebrate my mom, who died almost 32 years ago, but who left her loving fingerprints on my life. She loved me, purely and unconditionally and showed me the love of Jesus. She taught me to pray: prayers of generosity for all God's children, prayers of confession, knowing I was forgiven, prayers of daily gratitude and thanksgiving. She sat with me in worship and showed me how important it was to her. She braided loving acts of kindness into everyday life, modeling a life of faith. She welcomed my friends and made home sanctuary.

My maternal grandmother came to visit my parents for two weeks when my mother was pregnant with me ... and stayed 25 years! With only a fourth grade education in Sweden and no seminary education, my grandmother was hugely important in shaping my brother and me in the faith. When she told us a story of her childhood, Jesus was always a main character. When she read a Bible story to us, my brother and I were there, too. My grandmother knew the Bible by heart, her heart, and shared it with us in all of the moments of our lives together. Her life was a prayer, a constant conversation with the One who created, loved, and redeemed her ... and her grandchildren.

But they weren't my only faith mothers.

Miss Joy, tall and white haired, loving and infinitely patient, tended all the babies and toddlers in the nursery. With virtually no toys or books, she sang us the songs of faith, told us the stories of faith, and rocked us in the faith. Long after we were three or 13 or 23, she would light up with a smile when she saw us and inquire, "Is it well with your soul?" "How is your walk with Jesus?" I never thought it was her hair that framed her face, but a halo that shown God's love on all of us.

Miss Kirk never married or had children either. She worshipped at the 9:00am service, sitting in the back pew. My mother had gone with my brother to prepare their Sunday school class. My father tucked me into that pew while he ushered, before he scooped me up and took me to my class. And there, every week of the year, was Miss Kirk. A shy Victorian lady, she smiled warmly at me when I arrived. I never gave her a chance to prepare her heart or mind for worship, because I had my whole week saved up to share with her. She listened and listened and listened to me. I knew that God loved me, because Miss Kirk listened ... and invited me, all by myself, twice a year to high tea in her home. She died when I was eight, but I have a beautiful bone china teacup with a green flowered K, a daily reminder of the faith parents God sends into our lives.

Today, I invite each of you to remember your faith mothers and thank God for them. Today, I invite each of you to become a faith parent to the children in your midst. They need you. God sends you to them, to "go, make disciples."

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Together, talk about who have been your "faith mothers." Have adults share theirs. Ask the children to identify both those related to them and those who have been "faith mothers."
2. Think about ways to honor all those women, living and dead, at your table or across the world.
3. Create a display of photos of these women. If you don't have a photo, draw a picture or write the name and add it to the display. Add a small vase and flowers.
4. On Mother's Day, give thanks in your family prayers for these women, for the qualities they exemplified, for what they taught you, for the faith in Jesus that they made contagious.
5. Call or write a note or card to the women who are alive and thank them, describing their gift to you.