

The Rev. Hannah Moderow / Easter 6 / May 10, 2026
St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Anchorage, Alaska

Fierce Love, Baby Bears, and God as Mother

Last Sunday, after church, I was running errands with my kids. We'd already picked up groceries, and our next stop was Alaska Mill and Feed for dog food.

True confession: I was already thinking ahead: *What in the world will I preach on Mother's Day?*

Mother's Day is a hard one. I come to this day with the awareness that our culture promotes and celebrates a very narrow definition of motherhood—one that all too often excludes more women than it includes. It's also a day that stirs up grief and sadness for so many. And we need to honor that, here in our sanctuary and community.

So... there I was, driving and thinking about all this Mother's Day fraught-ness... By this time, we were down near Ship Creek, just crossed over the old train tracks, and the kids were playing DJ, blaring music in the backseat, when I saw it.

A black blob running through the woods beside the road.

A black bear!

This was exciting all by itself until I spotted three little black blobs loping behind her.

"Baby bears!" I hollered to the kids, over their very loud music.

"We see them, mom!" they assured me, over the noise.

I pulled off the road and put on my emergency blinkers.

Then we sat there, in the car, watching black bears for a long time.

The sight was cute at first: A mother with fresh bear cubs. The babies were hardly bigger than our pet Jack Russell terrier, surely just a few days—or maybe even a few hours--old.

The mama bear climbed a tree, as if to keep watch, and the baby bears loped playfully along a fallen trunk.

The scene felt picture-perfect at first, almost like a sappy Hallmark card, until I began thinking about the future for these bears. I began wondering...

Can they survive in this city? ...just a stone's throw from downtown Anchorage. What if they ambled up the hill and into the dumpsters of local businesses? What if they met a jogger or traipsed into the nearby RV park. Danger lurked all around.

What if... What if... What if...?

Anyone else here like to play the "What if" game?

Enjoy the moment, Hannah, I reminded myself. It's rare to see a black bear with tiny cubs from the safety of a car.

One of the cubs then started climbing a chain link fence with barbed wire at the top....I wasn't worried that they'd end up on the wrong side of the fence—because it was just a section of fence... but I *was* worried the cub would get skewered by the barbed wire....

When the cub reached the top, she *did* seem to get stuck there.

The cub lingered for way too long up there, squirming a bit, wriggling his fur out of the fence, and eventually flipped safely over to the other side.

I breathed a sigh of relief as she climbed down the other side.

But soon after, the next cub began his dangerous ascent up the fence.

The Mama bear looked on from her perch in the tree. She looked on as the next cub squirmed also at the top of the barbed wire fence—before flipping to the other side.

It went on like this for a while, until it hit me. Here was a **stunning image of God as Mother Bear.**

God who walks beside us, stands among us, and loves us fiercely, even and especially when life is treacherous. Even when, like her baby black bears, we get stuck at the top of a barbed wire fence, literally or spiritually.

God as Mother? You might be thinking to yourself: what is this new priest preaching? We typically refer to God as Father, don't we?

Most of the time we do, and that is not necessarily a bad thing.

But what better day than this one—Mother's Day—a day all-too-often reduced to exclusive celebrations-- to mine Scripture and our lives for images of God as Mother.

In *Revelations of Divine Love*, 14th century English mystic, Julian of Norwich (c. 1343–1416) writes, “**Just as God is our Father, so God is also our mother.**”

This statement was daring in her own time, and it feels daring, even now.

And yet, when we probe our Scripture for feminine images of God, we receive rich imagery... and enter into a more expansive spiritual landscape. One that does not fit neatly into Hallmark cards, but invites us into a powerful understanding of God.

One of my friends from seminary, Pastor Chris Clark, writes, “When we allow scripture her whole breadth of feminine language, we recover a full range of power, care, comfort, disruption, and presence. Not just sentimentality! For us to recover the feminine in God is to recover a depth that holds both tenderness and force, both holding and unsettling.”¹

Examples of **God as Mother** in Scripture are few, but the ones that exist are mighty. I'll share just three examples here to give you a taste, but I encourage to go look for them later... and dig deeper.

- **God as Mother Eagle from Deuteronomy.**

Here, God is portrayed “As an eagle who stirs up its nest / and hovers over its young, / as it spreads its wings, takes them up, and bears them aloft on its pinions.” (Deuteronomy 32:11)

¹ <https://chrisclarkmc.substack.com/p/heavenly-mother-hallowed-be-thy-name>

- **God as Mother Bear from Hosea 13:8**

Here, God's judgment is described like this: "I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs / and will tear open the covering of their heart."
(Hosea 13:8)

Friends, this is not a quaint motherly message, is it? It's a scary and FIERCE love.

- **God as Mother Hen from Luke 13:34 (Matt 23:37)**

In this passage from Luke's gospel, Jesus has a spicy conversation with the Pharisees who tell Jesus that Herod wants to kill him.

Jesus says, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.'....[and then, slightly later, Jesus goes on to say...] "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a **hen gathers her brood under her wings**, and you were not willing!"

Nadia Bolz-Weber so perfectly captures what Jesus means here with the Mother Hen imagery. She writes:

"...a Mother Hen of a God doesn't keep foxes from being dangerous . . . a Mother Hen of a God keeps foxes from being what determines how we experience the unbelievably beautiful gift of being alive. God the Mother Hen gathers all of her downy feathered, vulnerable little ones under God's protective wings so that we know where we belong, because it is there that we find warmth and shelter."²

In all three of these images of God as Mother in our Scriptures, we encounter a fierce love... A fierce love that is needed to climb and overcome the barbed wire fences of our lives.

**

As you may have noticed, our readings for today say little on the topic of God as Mother...

² <https://cac.org/daily-meditations/a-mother-hen-god-2022-03-28/>

But in Psalm 66, I do hear whispers from my bear sighting.

The Psalmist writes (and we sang earlier):

**“God holds our souls in life
And will not allow our feet to slip.” (Psalm 66:8)**

In this verse, I picture the Mother Black Bear in her tree, watching her baby bears climb up and over that fence.

I see the feminine side of God, who holds our souls, who loves fiercely, and determinedly, like a Mother Eagle, a Mother Bear, or a Mother Hen...willing the feet of those bear cubs—and all of us—safely to the other side.

*

In closing, I'd like to add that on Monday morning, the day after our bear sighting, I drove back to the woods where I had seen the bears.

I suspected the bears wouldn't be there anymore, but I felt a connection to the place—and its story. The trees. The fence. The proximity to danger. The ground upon which Mama bear and her cubs roamed.

As I pulled up to the spot, I turned on my emergency blinkers, just in case...

Lo and behold, there she was, the Mama bear, lying at the foot of the tree, with her three cubs by her side.

They weren't traversing the fence this time. They seemed to be just waking up from a nap... or maybe a meal.

Danger still lurked all around them—the city, the RV park, the barbed wire, the garbage cans and our city with its population of over a quarter million humans.

But this time, I saw it right away.

The image of God as Mother. God as Mother with her fierce, precarious, and ever-protective LOVE.

A fierce love that is even stronger than fear and danger.

This Mother Bear God who holds our souls in life, and will not allow our feet--or paws--to slip.

Amen.