

Gendered Language in Liturgy

Presentation by The Rev. Katie Holicky

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Materials: Flip Chart (two if possible), markers, Babytron, Powerpoint, Notes, copies of Bibles and BCPs, copies of article referenced, pronoun pins

10:05 SLIDE: Welcome, Territory Acknowledgement

SLIDE: Opening Prayer

10:10 Disclaimer:

- All of us will feel slightly or very differently about this topic. That is OK!
- I entered into this work by studying this in seminary through both a pastoral and liturgical lens. If this is new for you, please take it easy. It's a lot to digest. You don't have to buy into every word shared, though my hope is we are all able to turn things over and examine how God is calling us to grow through both our comfort and discomfort.
- Can we agree to ...
 - Trust that we all enter into this space with good intentions
 - SLIDE: Family Group: Growing Together With...
 - Self Regulate in the midst of our big feelings
 - Deep breaths, butterfly taps

10:15

- SLIDE: Defining Terms
 - Gendered language in liturgy
 - What do I mean by this... well I very pointedly mean the ways in which binary (he/she), specifically male binary pronouns are used to describe God and the Holy Spirit (in our creeds)
 - Pronouns
 - They, she, he
 - And there are others
 - Womanist Ethics
 - Moving forward from the idea that when we seek liberation for the most oppressed all of us are liberated
 - Queer folkx / LGBTQIA+
 - Overview of each letter and the +

- For the record, this isn't just about queer folkx, it is about all of us. For ex. It is about the women in this community who have shared that seeing God as female is a deep connection for them. It is about expanding our consciousness to reach for a more expansive, life giving, full vision of the divine in God and so too each of us.
- Christian Welcome of All
 - 1. Is this important to us as a community?
 - 2. What does this mean to you?

10:25

- SLIDE: How big is God?
 - God is bigger than our human understanding
 - Any one name of God would never be able to name the fullness of the vastness of God
 - When our language boxes God in we run the risk of not opening ourselves to expanding our hearts to the many facets of the fullness of God's diverse divinity
 - We also look to the ancients... Ancient Hebrews had multiple names for God that helped to describe the senses of God's relationality
 - Following passage is again from that Sojonours article titled, ["Actually 'They' is a Beautiful Pronoun for God"](#). Mary Lee shared this with me in 2022 and we ran it in the weekly Friday Email for a few weeks and made printed copies available as well. So maybe you have read this...

Despite the male-centric circumstance of the text, God is not defined strictly in masculine language. The Bible sometimes utilizes grammatically feminine words for God, **such as *ruach***, which is the Hebrew word for God's spirit. The writers of the Bible repeatedly compare God to a mother (Deuteronomy 32:11-12, 18; Psalm 131:2; Isaiah 42:14; 49:15; 66:13; Hosea 11:3-4; 13:8). In the gospels, Jesus likens himself to a mother hen wishing to protect her children in the safety of her wings (Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34). Additionally, Jesus describes the Christ-character as a woman in the parable of the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10). These passages

paint stunning and emotional portraits of God's femininity.

Given both masculine and feminine descriptions of God in scripture, what pronouns are appropriate for us to ascribe to God? God is neither a man nor a woman, and yet God has both masculine and feminine characteristics. We need more expansive language to describe the truth and beauty of God."

10:30

- SLIDE: Who do we need God to be?
 - This could be about an image, ideal, relational aspect... anything!
 - If we are all reflections of God as we are made in God's image, so, then we see ourselves and each other as parts of God
 - No one is an abomination for who they are and everyone deserves to be the fullness of their self through various points of identity
- Small Groups: Who do you need God to be for us and in the world? (keep scripture in mind! Jesus = Hen, things from the Baptismal Covenant or maybe Creeds)
- Share Out: words or phrases from convo, not full recount. We want to capture these words or phrases on this flip chart.

10:45

- SLIDE: God has many names! (What names for God can we identify?)
 - Small Groups: What names can we come up with for God? Think about our first list in who we need God to be for us and in the world?
 - Share Out: words or phrases from convo, not full recount. We want to capture these words or phrases on this flip chart.

10:55

- SLIDE: What about what scripture says?

- Did the Bible get it wrong? Well yes and no.... We need to take into account historical context. Jesus “fathered” God because he was in a culture and place where things were centered on the masculine...
 - This is again from that Sojourners Article:

“Since the Bible is a tool of God’s self-revelation, it’s important to consider all the ways that God is described in scripture and avoid focusing solely on the masculine pronouns ascribed to God. We must acknowledge that part of the reason the biblical text often describes God in masculine terms is because it was written in a **hyper-patriarchal context** where men were the **most literate, powerful, and privileged population**. Many of the biblical authors are unknown, but scholars believe much (if not all) of the Bible was **written by men.**”
- Jesus was clear about welcome and care of the most vulnerable and that is where we center this work ... in welcome and care of the vulnerable.
- We are a church born of reformation. Reformation that opened up space for lay people and for everyone to have access to participating and examining their own faith individually and collectively. Our genesis as a tradition, in a way, was about opening up welcome to more people.
 - When we stop reforming or changing with the needs of the world we will surely die
 - Language evolves just as our humanity and culture do
 - The language of our culture is changing... no matter how each of us might feel about it... it is changing.
 - Some folks in the room might remember when Michael Jackson changed “bad” to mean “good”
- The Episcopal Church is a opening and welcoming church which sets us apart in the Worldwide Anglican Communion which is NOT

11:00

- SLIDE: brothers / brothers, sisters / brothers, sisters, siblings
- SLIDE: Where are we now?

- 8am (Rooted in BCP Tradition as is)
 - BCP, though celebrants “expand” Eucharistic Prayers
- 9am (The Test Kitchen)
 - Order of St. Helena Psalms
 - No binaries for God
 - Pronoun pins
 - Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer
- 10:30am (Principle Liturgy with Tastes from the Test Kitchen)
 - First Sunday Life Together (same as 9, though some pronouns in hymns)
 - Presentation Hymn
 - Eucharistic Prayers: Expansive Language BCP, Enriching Our Worship
 - Blessings: Using varied resources and not using ‘Father’ in most cases
- SLIDE: Side by Side Psalms

- Order of St. Helena **Psalm 22:22-30**

- 22 May all who fear you, O God, give praise; *
 may the offspring of Israel stand in awe
 and all of Jacob’s line give glory.
- 23 For you do not despise nor abhor the poor in their poverty,
 neither do you hide your face from them, *
 but when they cry to you, you hear them.
- 24 My praise is of you in the great assembly; *
 I will perform my vows in the presence of those who
 worship you.
- 25 The poor shall eat and be satisfied,
 and those who seek you shall praise you: *
 “May your heart live for ever!”
- 26 All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to you, *
 and all the families of the nations shall bow before you.
- 27 For yours is the royal power, O God; *
 you rule over the nations.
- 28 To you alone all who sleep in the earth bow down in worship; *
 all who go down to the dust fall before you.
- 29 My soul shall live for you;
 my descendants shall serve you; *
 they shall be known as yours for ever.
- 30 They shall come and make known to a people yet unborn *
 the saving deeds that you have done.

- **BCP Psalm 22:22-30**

- 22 Praise the LORD, you that fear him; *
 stand in awe of him, O offspring of Israel;
 all you of Jacob's line, give glory.

- 23 For he does not despise nor abhor the poor in their poverty;
neither does he hide his face from them; *
but when they cry to him he hears them.
- 24 My praise is of him in the great assembly; *
I will perform my vows in the presence of those who worship him.
- 25 The poor shall eat and be satisfied,
and those who seek the LORD shall praise him: *
"May your heart live for ever!"
- 26 All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, *
and all the families of the nations shall bow before him.
- 27 For kingship belongs to the LORD; *
he rules over the nations.
- 28 To him alone all who sleep in the earth bow down in worship; *
all who go down to the dust fall before him.
- 29 My soul shall live for him;
my descendants shall serve him; *
they shall be known as the LORD'S for ever.
- 30 They shall come and make known to a people yet unborn *
the saving deeds that he has done.

- What do you notice?

- How does it make you feel?

11:10

- SLIDE: Where might we go from here? (*keeping in mind no one is throwing the baby out with the bath water, ex. I don't know if we are allowed to change the Creed in our Principle Service*)
 - Music?
 - Lord's Prayer?
 - Psalms?
 - Keep noticing, chatting, praying, thinking...
 - So, where might we go from here?

11:25

- Slide: Thanksgivings (*as our shared closing prayer*)
 - A word or phrase of Thanksgiving for our time today.
 - What are you taking away?