

TOGETHER RISING

Our world today is constantly bombarded with noise and anger and strife- from the news that comes from far, far away, to the angry person in the car behind you. Often, we find it so hard to block out those sounds, to ignore the negative and then... you see it- A smile, a nod, a wink, a friendly voice saying hello and the world around you changes. It is amazing how the little things can totally turn your frown upside down. Take last Monday – that first beautiful spring day- the afternoon sun was still warm, the trees and flowers popping along the roads and in our yards- you could taste the return of warmer days, new life, joy and smiles. And I was driving away from my family. I was taking some time to be with a few friends and renew my own spirit. Doing what the airlines, social media and our doctors tell us to do and putting on my oxygen mask first. Laughter, stories of the weekly struggle and a time to reconnect with our own selves. I hear it all the time- take time for you- take a bath, go for a walk, read a book... I'm in bed two minutes after getting my kids to bed, if not before them half the time! It can be a challenge to do so, yet it is so worth it for us and the world around us when we do. The butterfly effect- when you emit calm and happiness, it radiates.

Today is Mother's Day- to which my son eloquently said on Tuesday when someone mentioned it, "Oh Crap"... yes, Mother's Day- That holiday that is supposed to honor all of the sacrifices mothers make for their children. The same one which has become so commercialized that you can't get a brunch reservation without at least an hours wait ... now don't get me wrong- I love being showered with affection and preschool gifts of googly eyed flowers and cards from my boys, and I will be so happy to have them hug me and give a little wave from the sports fields

this weekend, yet I have become a believer in the thought that the act of mothering includes all parents, grandparents, non-parents and every single one of you sitting in front of me.

Mothering takes on so many forms that it cannot be limited to only those of us who identify as female and have or are raising children. It can be so much more than that for many different people. And we might not realize it when we have provided a caring thought, word or deed to someone that needed it at that very moment. A favorite book from when my boys were little was Are You My Mother?. Dr. Seuss knew a thing or two about kids and stories and things that encouraged thinking. You might not believe the Snort was a mother figure, but that loader did place the scared little bird back into its tree! Right place, right time and love happened. This visual of the bird searching for the actual mother but being cared for throughout the journey by so many different creatures showed me that there are so many other ways that we can provide nurture and love to our kids and others.

For the last 5 years I served on the First Parish Staff as the Youth Ministries Coordinator. This meant that I took my idyllic memory of youth groups past - the Sunday movies, weekly activities and even a trip out west to visit a "sister" youth group and figured- why wouldn't kids want to do that now? It was so fun to hang with those friends and do those things. Let's try apple picking, a movie night, maybe pizza and conversation? Well, no, that didn't work out too well. Intentions were good until the regrets started pouring in because these kids have way too much going on already. One more activity was not in the cards. Try as I may, Youth Group of years past was not ready for a comeback.

Until Confirmation. This class where Mary lovingly says- I will support your parents in forcing you to take this class and then support YOU to choose if you want to be confirmed- was where I began to understand the broadening of my motherhood and life journey. Imagine the room over the stage in Fellowship Hall filled with 17 sleepy, quiet, hungry, thoughtful, bashful teens. It really was like Snow White and the 17 dwarfs... It was a challenge trying to figure out their names and big kid faces and how to get them interested in the conversations, questions and stories that ultimately brought out some incredible voices, artists and hearts. I quickly realized my motherhood journey was changing.

Many people will say that having children of your own is something inexplicable, and that it is hard to find something that compares. I believe that – and thank my two boys for bestowing the title mom on me- but I have come to realize that we don't do it alone, and that this exposure to others' children provides us with experiences just as profound. The elusive teenager often leaves us scratching our head and asking if we were like that, and yes, we all were. But when we stop and listen, there is so much to learn from each other. For each confirmand, part of their journey is to find a mentor (selfless plug- there's a new class starting in the fall- if you're interested in learning more about anything - reach back out to me). Many of us have enjoyed mentors in our lives for a variety of different reasons. This class includes this partnership so that the student has an adult figure, who is not their parent, participate in a piece of their life and more specifically help them with their faith journey. Ideally this relationship grows and continues for years to come. How many of you have participated in this program? Do you still remember/talk to/ email/ mentee? When I see pairs I've worked with reconnect for a fleeting moment during services, it makes my heart sing. It is not a coincidence to me that Mentor starts with M as well.

Another milestone point in the Confirmation class is where each student is asked to connect with a parishioner who is not family, maybe a close friend, and preferably of their grandparent's generation or older. "For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function". These conversations allow the student's eyes to open to the wider church body and show them there is more than just Sunday morning and occasional other activities. They get to know more of you in the church as individuals. And vice versa! Seeing the connections continue, even if only as a smile in passing, is a movement that often provides much needed inspiration. Making connections allows for our large congregation to feel like an extended family.

This past Tuesday evening I was sitting with over 800 amazing parents, families and friends watching bands from 5th grade through high school perform in the All Town Band Concert. I sat there and I realized how my own life was touched by each group present... One of our 1st graders sat on my lap and danced her way through the entire event (maybe we both sang along to the Wizard of Oz medley), as each band played I whispered in her ear check out that kid playing the drums, you know him from Sunday school, see those two girls in the front there? They played with you when you were in the Nursery! She's not my daughter, but I am so happy to have her let me be a part of her life!

Which makes me wonder... how can we continue our mothering when we are sitting in our pews for an hour? How can you share your gifts with others? Look about you- are you in your normal seat? Do you have a specific section that you prefer and when someone is missing from it, do you check in on them next time to make sure all is ok? Or do you like to mix it up and try a new

view every week? How can we continue to practice mothering in this comfortable space?

Sometimes all it takes is a quick glance and smile to spread the love of angels amongst us.

The peekaboo with the squirmy little in front of us. (ps- if you ever have one, I am sure there are lots of willing arms to bounce the baby)

Ask the quiet teen about the sport they play (hint -check out their jackets/ sweatshirts for help on this one).

Or give them insight if you know that there are cookies at coffee hour. I've been a part of this congregation for almost 35 years and the people are the best part of our space. I may not see most of you outside of these walls much, but the times I do, I can feel angels around us.

It also helps when you see a parent dealing with the things you did with your kids a few days or decades before and you can walk by and give the eyebrow salute- you are not alone fellow parent. Receiving these knowing glances- not judging ones, and you know you will make it. One of my favorite things my grandmother said to me was "I survived your uncles; you will survive those two". It really comes down to what Maya Angelou reiterated- "People will forget what you said, People will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." I feel warmth here, love here, joy here, sadness here, safety here, encouragement here, belief here. I breathe here.

The body of the church takes on a realistic meaning when you look around and see the different faces, thoughts, paths that brought each of us here today. We are all different members and support our church by recreating this body each week. Where else can you make connections that result in a fly by hugging from a teen in the increasing darkness at a football game? Or quick

encouraging words from your pew mate over produce in Hannaford or mothers getting a night out for dinner when the power goes out and we laugh over candle light for hours? I value our community and all the pieces that make up the quilt of our church. I am humbled to have served your children, I am honored that you have served mine. Remember we spell together as TO-GET-HER- let's serve her. And, Together, Rising, share the wonder and the light of love of a mother with each other.