

Sermon for Christ Church, Spotsylvania, VA
Proper 21, Year B, September 30, 2018
The Rev. Bill Queen, "The Motherhood of God"

are you familiar with Dame Julian of Norwich? (spelled like sandwich); she was an English nun who lived in the late 14th and early 15th centuries; she experienced visions of God which she recorded in a book called either *Revelations of Divine Love*, or *Showings*; it focuses on God's love and how in the act of prayer we actually put ourselves into God's presence and experience God's love directly; Julian lived as a recluse, apart from the world, in order to spend most of her life in prayer, but she did make herself available as a spiritual counselor, and many people, men and women, sought her out for her wisdom and compassion

her most well-known quote is probably this: "All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well;" you might want to memorize that as a prayer to voice anytime things don't seem to be going well: "All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well."

it is because of our focus on Episcopal Church Women and Episcopal Church Men today that led me to think about Julian; she, more than any other theologian throughout the history of the church, speaks of God in feminine images; she used feminine images of God because that was how the visions that she experienced depicted God; she recorded the images and impressions in the way that God sent them to her, so it was God showing God's own feminine nature to her and, through her, to us

today's reading from Esther shows us how a powerful woman did a great thing to save many of God's people; there are many important women in the Bible; and if you search the Bible for feminine imagery of God, you'll find that there is plenty of it; Jesus himself often resorts to feminine images of God's love and care for us; Julian's imagery is even more explicit than anything we get from the Bible; for example:

some of it is a simple depiction of God: "God is as really our Mother as he is our Father."

some of it is Trinitarian in nature: "I saw the blessed Trinity working. I saw that there were these three attributes: fatherhood, motherhood, and

lordship—all in one God;” “I realized that the great power of the Trinity is our Father, the deep wisdom of our Mother, and the great love our Lord.”

and in some of it she particularly identifies the feminine nature of God with Jesus: “By the skill and wisdom of [Christ] we are sustained, restored, and saved...for he is our Mother, Brother, and Savior;” ““Our Mother’ describes the different ways in which [Christ] works.... In our Mother, Christ, we grow and develop; in his mercy he reforms and restores us; through his passion, death, and resurrection he has united us to our being;” “We see that Jesus is the true Mother of our nature...He is our Mother, too, by grace, because he took our created nature upon himself. All the lovely deeds and tender services that beloved motherhood implies are appropriate to [Christ].”

notice how Julian uses both masculine and feminine images for God at the same time; she shows us that the feminine images do not in any way take away from or replace the more familiar masculine images of God; they stand beside each other to give us a more complete understanding of God; this shouldn’t really surprise us; recall that in the creation story (Genesis 1:27) we are told that “God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them;” clearly this does not mean that God looks or acts like either a man or a woman; humanity shares the image of God in ways that must include both masculinity and femininity, and then go on to transcend any gender-based conceptions whatsoever

this kind of theology not only broadens the way we think about God; it also serves to elevate our conceptions both of femininity and of women; something that for centuries had been relegated to the intimate, the private, the family, within the home, takes on a larger role and a greater significance; it gives femininity an important theological dimension which it has seldom had in the history of the church, since the church has relied almost exclusively on masculine images for God and, until relatively recently, even in its ideas for who can take leadership roles in the church

so as we celebrate the ministries of both our women’s and men’s groups today, remember that God’s love has both female and male aspects to it; remember that even Jesus’ examples of love and service, which we carry out in all of our ministries here at Christ Church, have qualities expressed in both women and in men