### “As a Mother” Steve Finlan for The First Church, July 3, 2022

**Isaiah 66:10–14**

10 Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her—11 that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious bosom.

12 For thus says the Lord: I will extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse and be carried on her arm, and dandled on her knees.
13 As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

**Luke 10:1, 16–19**

1After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. . .

16 “Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”

17 The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!” 18He said to them, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. 19See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you.”

Welcome all, on this bright summer’s day, a time when many families are gathering, and people enjoy each other’s company. Some of my fondest memories are of the family gatherings of my mother’s side of the family in Rochester when we were children, including for the Fourth of July. As you grow up, isn’t it funny how some memories are of the big events but some are ordinary and small gatherings? You, fathers and mothers, have been a guiding influence in your children’s lives. You dads, have you noticed that sometimes you need to “mother” your children? You moms, have you needed to sometimes take on a fatherly role?

There are several places in the Old Testament where the maternal image of God as a mothering bird is given. This Isaiah passage uses a human image, and it is one of the most vivid. At first it is Jerusalem who will nurse her inhabitants, and the narrator tells them they’ll be nursed, carried, and “dandled on her knees” (66:12). Then it is God himself who will act like a mother, comforting the Jews “as a mother comforts her child” (66:13). Jesus used a mother image for his own care for the Jewish people, when he lamented “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” (Luke 13:34).

Sometimes the Father image is the best metaphor for God, sometimes the Mother image is. The Mother image tends to bring out the ideas of sheltering, holding close, patience, feeding, and caring. When the children go astray, God’s heartache is like a mother’s heartbreak. Jesus would have tenderly led the Jewish people if they had allowed him to. But their religious leaders were too attached to their positions of power and prestige. This has been a familiar pattern for religious leaders around the world; it is not a special feature of Jewish people. People—often, but not always, *men—*cling to power and prestige, and preen themselves with pride. Better to be honest and teachable, like children.

Let us look at the gospel passage. Jesus trains seventy evangelists; they will represent him, just as he represents the Father. They rejoice that even the demons submit to them, and Jesus affirms he gave them that power. Then he utters that intriguing stand-alone statement: “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning” (10:18). There is a similar line in the Gospel of John: “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out” (John 12:31).

These indicate that Satan has been defeated and deposed from whatever heavenly office he used to hold. It is hard for some Christians to believe that Satan is deposed, given the enormous amounts of evil on earth from that day to this, but I think we need to accept that humans can choose to do enormous evil, without any supernatural urging. Human greed, lust for power, and hatred of identified enemies are sufficient to explain the worst of human cruelty. It is good to know that Satan, who used to be one of the heavenly powers and authorities, no longer holds such authority. Now it is up to us to choose, to discern right from wrong, to elect leaders who would guide us, who are not swayed by money, or prestige, or power for its own sake.

In Ephesians 2:2 we hear mention of “the ruler of the power of the air.” Satan was a cosmic ruler, but fell through envy and lust for power. Revelation says “that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him” (Rev 12:9). Colossians says Jesus is the “head of every ruler and authority” (Col 2:10). “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it” (Col 2:15). It seems that Jesus got the rulers and authorities back on track after removing Satan.

I think these texts unite to tell us that Satan has been deposed. But we know that evil has not been deposed in many human hearts. However, we have to stop seeing Satan as the cause of all evil. It is too easy to blame all of our faulty actions, our poor choices, on Satan. Most evil arises straight out of human selfishness and bad choice, also out of unpredictable complications and roadblocks. We have to look at the human causation of evil and error, and at practical and wise human solutions. We have to take responsibility.

Let us not grieve our Creator who loves us like a father, like a mother, wanting to guide and protect us, but knowing we have to face life bravely. God is rooting for us, ready to nurse and comfort us but also needing us to be responsible adults who make decisions. At the end of the day, our mother can’t make our decisions for us; our father isn’t going to tell us what to do; we have to grow up and seek and choose what is right.

Peter had to make a decision to consider Gentiles clean and acceptable. In a trance, he heard a voice say to him “What God has made clean, you must not call profane” (Acts 10:15). He then later said to some Gentiles, “God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean” (10:28), and “God shows no partiality” (10:34). He saw Gentiles receiving the Holy Spirit, and then he baptized them (10:45–48). It was a big important decision to include the Gentiles as equals.

So even Peter as an apostle was still growing in his understanding, was willing to adjust, to amend his beliefs so as to act with Christian kindness to his fellows.

As children of God we are often tested, troubled, and confused by what life will bring on our journey. These trials and tribulations are training us, to allow us to make difficult decisions. Through all of these moments God and Jesus love us completely, even as we sometimes falter. Remember at the end of the day we give all our cares up to Jesus and rest assuredly in God’s loving arms.