

## **Virtual Lesson Plan for TED Talks Faith 4/19**

### **Yifat Susskind, “In uncertain times, think like a mother”**

One of the most compelling theology texts I read as an undergrad was a book called *Revelations of Divine Love* by a female mystic theologian of the medieval era, Julian of Norwich. In this text, as in many works of mystical theology, Julian recounts her experiences of communion with God in striking detail, describing her encounters with the divine in the form of vivid visions. In one of these visions, Julian comes to understand characteristics of God in new ways. She writes, “Jesus Christ, who himself overcame evil with good, is our true Mother. We received our being from him, and this is where his maternity starts. And with it comes the gentle protection and guard of love which will never cease to surround us. Just as God is our Father, so God is our Mother.”

This striking image – of a God who “mothers” us – is one that has remained in my theological imagination since I first encountered it. We are all familiar with God-as-Father imagery, because it pervades our theological language, hymnody, and liturgy. But what about God-as-Mother imagery? This is likely new for many of us, and it invites us to open up our theological vocabulary to understand more of who God is. Language always falls short of truly describing God; such is the nature of language. But expansive images and metaphors for God help us to broaden the way that we think of and know the God who is beyond all language. As we engage today’s TED Talk, I hope you will keep this image of God-as-Mother in your mind and let it inform the way that you hear the Talk.

-Rev. Alexandra Mauney

1. **Read:** Find a Bible and read these three verses from the book of Isaiah. Each of these verses comes from a different passage in which God is speaking to the people of Israel; read the whole chapter if you’d like to gain more context!
  - a. Isaiah 42:14
  - b. Isaiah 49:15
  - c. Isaiah 66:12-13
2. **Watch:**  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/yifat\\_susskind\\_in\\_uncertain\\_times\\_think\\_like\\_a\\_mother/transcript](https://www.ted.com/talks/yifat_susskind_in_uncertain_times_think_like_a_mother/transcript)
3. **Questions for discussion or reflection:**
  - a. If you *are* a mother, did you resonate with Susskind’s description of how mothers think and act? If you aren’t a mother, think of a mother in your life. Does your experience of that person resonate with the speaker’s description?
  - b. The speaker quotes poet Alexis De Veaux, who says, “Motherhood is not simply the organic process of giving birth. It’s an understanding of the needs of the world.” With this broad understanding of what it means to “mother,” how might we understand the prophet Isaiah’s use of mothering imagery for God?

- c. What do you think about Susskind's overall argument that "thinking like a mother is a tool we can all use to build the world we want"? What might our theological tradition have to say about this kind of statement, or how might we nuance it differently?

**4. Pray:**

In closing, use this hymn after Julian of Norwich as a prayer.

Mothering God, you gave me birth  
in the bright morning of this world.  
Creator, source of every breath,  
you are my rain, my wind, my sun.

Mothering Christ, you took my form,  
offering me your food of light,  
grain of new life, and grape of love,  
your very body for my peace.

Mothering Spirit, nurturing one,  
in arms of patience hold me close,  
so that in faith I root and grow  
until I flower, until I know.