

MAY 10, 2026

HELD IN LOVE

By Pr. Beate Chun

The Phone Call in the Night

It is the middle of the night
and the ringing of the phone
jolts the house awake.

She has been waiting for
this phone call—and dreading it—
ever since she had learned
that her son had been taken
hostage.

Her son had been travelling
in Somalia as a journalist
and of course, she had
been terribly worried,
but it was getting to the end of his trip,
and she was almost starting to relax a little bit...
But then there was a knock on the door,
and the FBI was there,
telling her that her son had been kidnapped
and that the kidnappers
would make contact soon.

And now, it is happening!
The phone is ringing.
And so much is at stake!

She has been coached
—by people who know these things—
that she must not sound like a mother.
She must be calm.
Controlled. Almost distant.

Because any crack in her voice,
any surge of panic,
or any expression of her love,
will be perceived as weakness
and the captors will press even further.

A Mother Under Extraordinary Pressure

This is the story of Marlis Saunders,
the mother of journalist Michael Moore.

In 2012, Michael Moore was captured by pirates in
Somalia while he was working on a report.
And then his captors called his 75-year-old mother
and asked for a 20 million dollar ransom
to be paid in 24 hours!

Can you imagine the shock
of such news?
Not only that your son has been captured,
but that his release is now in your hands!

What followed was a crisis
that lasted not just a few days or weeks,
but 977 days!
Nearly three years of uncertainty,
fear, and relentless emotional strain.

A mother who had never trained
for international hostage negotiations
suddenly had to learn how to speak with armed kidnappers.

She had to navigate translators,
intermediaries,
government officials,
and shifting demands.

She had to absorb legal advice,
security advice,
and negotiation strategy,
while living every day with the knowledge
that her son could be beaten, moved, or killed.

The captors were often nasty and threatening.
They showed her videos of her son
in which he looked terrible,
and where he was clearly being mistreated.

Often she felt helpless.
She couldn't go there.
She couldn't call.
She couldn't send care packages.

She could express her love
only through disciplined endurance.
By speaking carefully.
By learning to delay, to bargain, to project steadiness,
to survive emotionally while carrying
unbearable fear privately.

Two Different Captivities

Meanwhile,
on the other side of the globe,
her son, Michael Moore, had his own struggles.
His captivity was brutal and violent.
But he had known the risks
of reporting in Somalia,
and he had chosen those risks freely.

But now his mother
had to deal with the
consequences of those choices.

While he was physically imprisoned in Somalia,
she was living through her own kind of captivity,
because she too was
at the mercy of those captors.

He felt guilty
and troubled,
and at the same time
grateful and full of admiration.

He was looking forward
to the phone calls with his
mother whenever the captors allowed them.

His mother always spoke
in a cool and detached way.
At first he was puzzled by her coldness,
but then he was deeply relieved,
because he rightly guessed
that she had received guidance and coaching
and was not completely on her own.

Over time, he began to see her
not simply as “Mom,”
but as a remarkably capable human being,
forced into extraordinary responsibility
and meeting this crisis with resilience and strength.

In the end,
Marlis Saunders’ perseverance paid off.
She managed to renegotiate the
outrageous amount of 20 million dollars
down to 1.6 million.
And she raised this money
by reaching out to family and friends,

and supportive strangers,
and finally, on September 22, 2014,
her son was released.

The story of Marlis Saunders is
an extraordinary story
of resilience, persistence,
and a mother's love.

The Many Faces of Motherly Love

Today, on this Mother's Day,
we remember our mothers
and all those who provide motherly care.

Some of us know the steady
presence of a mother or caregiver
whose care has been a grounding force in our lives
—consistent, reliable, life-giving.

Some of us even had mothers and grandmothers
who gave us the foundation of our faith.
In our first reading, the apostle Paul the Apostle
praises Timothy for his sincere faith
and commented that this faith lived first
in Timothy's grandmother Lois,
and then in his mother Eunice,
and finally blossomed also in Timothy.

Surely, faith and love are wonderful gifts
to receive from a mother.

But for some of us, the relationship with our mother is
more complicated.
Sometimes care can be inconsistent,
or even absent when it is most needed.

Some of us lost our mothers too early.
Some of us became estranged,
and the bond became frayed and broken.

And many of us live somewhere in between
—grateful for the many blessings we received,
and longing for those that were not given.

But even in the best of circumstances,
human love has limits.
Even the most dedicated mother
will encounter exhaustion or hit a wall sometimes.

“I Will Not Leave You Orphaned”

Into this limitation,
the gospel speaks a kind,
gentle, and surprising word.

Today’s gospel
is part of a longer segment in the Gospel of Gospel of John
where Jesus says goodbye
to his disciples
and prepares them for the time
when he is no longer with them.

The setting is the last night
when they are together one final time.
They share one last meal together,
and with infinite care and tenderness,
Jesus washes his disciples’ feet.

And then he reassures them:
“I will not leave you orphaned.
I will not abandon you.
And I will ask the Father,
and he will give you another Advocate,
to be with you forever.”

Jesus knows our vulnerability
and our limitations.
He knows our fears and longings.
He knows that sometimes our love
cannot hold all that needs to be held.

But God can,
and God will,
hold everything in love.
And God's love helps us to love more.

And that is what the Advocate does.
The Holy Spirit comes alongside us
when our own strength is exhausted.

When mothers cannot protect,
when children feel lost,
when relationships are strained,
when fear overwhelms us,
the Spirit remains present.

Quietly.
Faithfully.
Steadily.

"I will not leave you orphaned,"
Jesus says.

That promise is larger than we imagine.

It is the promise of infinite and unconditional
love and presence.

And sometimes,
through the love of a mother,
through the endurance of a caregiver,
through the presence of a faithful friend,
we catch a glimpse
of that greater love
that will never let us go. Amen.

**Sermon for Sunday, May 10, 2026
6th Sunday of Easter | Mother's Day**

Presented at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church San Francisco

Text: [John 14:15-21 NRSVue - The Promise of the Holy Spirit - "If - Bible Gateway](#)

Tags: Easter Season | A Mother's Love | Human Limits | The Promise of the Advocate | Michael Moore | Marlis Saunders