

Mothering From the Womb: Embracing Early Mothering (Presbytera Kelley Lawrence)

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Share the love, joy, pain, healing, and whatever else it may bring

It was a colorful, sunny, fall morning at the resort in Florida. The night before, I had enjoyed a dinner and reception for the conference I was in town to attend. It had been an encouraging experience. As a resident physician, I was often working long hours and finding little time to visualize the future that lay ahead. However, at this conference focusing on breast-feeding medicine, I was surrounded by physicians (many of whom were mothers) who were doing things with their lives that were inspiring. As I talked to them about their practices, I remember feeling as if I were at a dinner tasting the appetizers...and I could almost smell the main course getting ready to be served. I had slept well that night after mingling and thinking ahead. I was starting to see the type of physician that I wanted to become. Beyond that, I was excited to hold the secret knowledge that a new life was forming inside of me, making me a mommy for the third time. As I tidied the resort room in preparation to leave later that afternoon, my mother and father helped me. They were there to babysit our youngest, a toddler, while I was in conferences—and we had made it a fun, family journey.



When I

removed the cushions from one big armchair to look for toys underneath, I found a laminated pocket card that showed a sculpture of big fatherly hands holding a tiny baby inside. On the card was the verse, “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.” – Psalm 139:13

I asked my mom if the card was hers. She said it wasn’t; I loved the image on the little card, so I made it mine and put it in my pocket. I thought about how God was knitting together another little one inside my own womb. I was already starting to plan a list of boy names and girl names and to wonder what our little one would look like and be like.

I remember that morning of packing and looking ahead with such clarity because of what happened later...

Just before we left for the airport, I started to miscarry. I tried to tell myself that perhaps it was implantation bleeding, but I knew it was really too late for that.

I am not a superstitious person, but I am a person of faith; I have always felt, when reflecting on that day, that the little laminated card I found that morning was God communicating to me that He was with me and that He was with our little one.

I was only in the first trimester of pregnancy and a precious few people knew that

we were expecting. However, my body and my mind and my heart and my soul fully knew that I was pregnant. One of the hardest things that I've experienced as a mother was this miscarriage.

Our societal consensus teaches mothers to hold back news of pregnancy until the baby makes it through that tenuous first trimester. I did just that...I held back the news, but I wouldn't ever do it again.

Depending on your source, between 10-25% of pregnancies miscarry and the vast majority of those miscarriages happen in the first trimester. It is thought that these losses are usually due to a chromosomal or other major abnormality that would have been incompatible with life; they are rarely due to anything under a mother's control.

I remember getting home from my trip and continuing to miscarry, knowing that I was expected to go into work and put on a happy face for my colleagues and my patients the following day. I simply couldn't do it. I called my clinic coordinator instead and let her know that I had been pregnant—and that I was no longer. I let her know that the hurt I was experiencing was more than I could bear that day. I requested one day for healing. The few people who shared the news of our pregnancy mourned our family's loss with us.

One day for healing was really not enough. The sting of miscarriage is real, and the loss of someone I never met felt and still feels far more intense than I could have imagined prior.

There are Orthodox prayers for miscarriage. I asked my husband to say those prayers with me and add them to the cries that my soul was already sending up to our Father:

Prayer After a Miscarriage

"O Sovereign Master, Lord our God, Who was born of the all-pure Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, and as an infant was laid in a manger: do You Yourself, according to Your great mercy, have regard for this Your servant (Name) who has miscarried that which was conceived in her. Heal her suffering, granting to her, O Loving Lord, health and strength of body and soul. Guard her with a shining Angel from every assault of sickness and weakness and all inward torment. You who accept the innocence of infancy in Your Kingdom, comfort the mind of Your servant and bring her peace. Amen."

One of the names that I had considered for a little girl for all three of our first pregnancies was Zoe. Our firstborn was a son. Our second was a son. Our third

pregnancy is the one that miscarried. Since then, we have had two daughters...but the name Zoe never resonated for me again for our baby girl's name. Zoe means life. I think that my Zoe is in heaven with our family members who have gone on and most importantly with our Christ. If I'm right about that, that the baby we lost was a little girl, I hope that my Zoe will be there waiting to meet me and welcome me whenever I make it to heaven.

I debated whether or not to share this experience when contemplating mothering from the womb; I decided to share because miscarriage is something that happens to more women than we know. This isn't something I write to generate fear, but I write to encourage support and love. I wish more people had known that I was pregnant so that more people could have offered hugs and love and prayers when our family experienced loss. I encourage pregnant mothers to let their community support them, even early in the pregnancy. Loss is hard, but it is harder alone. Joy is wonderful, and it is even more wonderful when shared! Either way, we grow in Christian love and community through our mothering experiences from the womb.

Source: www.familylifeministry.atlanta.goarch.org