

## **Mothering Sunday 2023 Exodus 2:1-10**

Mothering Sunday, **a Christian holiday** in some parts of Europe, which falls on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent. A day when traditionally all went back to their mother church, to the place where they were nurtured, loved, and formed into the ways of God. A special welcome if you are here today because this is your mother church.

19<sup>th</sup> century Servants in big houses were given the day off so they could visit their mother church and their own mothers – so they were back in time for the hard work preparing for Easter celebrations and Feast.

Today, often celebrated as **Mothers' Day, origins USA** secular holiday - a day to thank those who have mothered us in all the ways we can be cared for – give thanks for and celebrate not just mothers but older sisters, aunts, grandmothers, Godmothers, foster mothers, adoptive mothers, family friends and all others too.

Mothering is not confined to gender – mothering can also be provided by male and gender-neutral role-models, just as fathering can be provided by female & gender-neutral role-models. We all have aspects of all genders within us and this is the same for God:

Psalm 91:4 He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

A lovely image of the mothering nature of God

**We celebrate and give thanks for our mothers,** for those who gave us life. Some will gather around tables and share a meal today. Those of us whose mothers have died may recall times together, say a prayer, visit a grave, or whatever is helpful for us.

**Important to Acknowledge - a difficult day for many – me included.** There will be those in our church family who are not here today. For some of us, our experiencing of being mothered and parented were not altogether wholesome or happy. Parenting styles and methods have changed much over the years. Even our King has spoken openly about his own parenting and the emotional consequences he has experienced from being sent to Boarding school aged 7.

Perhaps, for some of us, we know the consequences of feeling unwanted, being unplanned, the wrong gender, being brought up in the Care system, Children's Homes, or placed in foster or adoptive families. These arrangements and placements can be good & wholesome, but others not so, or outrightly abusive, as we know from recent child abuse investigations.

For others today is difficult for other reasons. Perhaps we are estranged or separated from our children or our mothers for whatever reason – long distance, break-ups, death.

My many years working as a midwife was a privilege and joy – taught me much – thankfulness and wonder at new life, but also, for some, life can be fragile and fleeting. There will be women, and men, today, grieving because of infertility, miscarriage, stillbirth, and death of babies & young children.

I will not have been able to cover all situations today but whatever our circumstances, and feelings today, we can know that we are all part of God's family.

let us now turn to our Bible readings and think about what we notice as we go through them?

Firstly, we see the big picture of God's story – writings from 1400yrs BC in Exodus, to the time when Jesus was alive in the Gospel, to the AD 70 in the writings of St Paul

Also, What do we notice about God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit, as a parental figure

What is God teaching us today about our Christian faith

How can we put our learnings into practice?

**Exodus** written by Moses, describes God's rescue of his people, the Israelites, from enslavement in a foreign land. This happened through a series of God's calls and the responses of his people. Our passage today recalls the birth of Moses who God had chosen to use in his rescue plan.

But first a reminder of the context:

Remember Joseph & Technicolor dream coat. 400 years had passed since Joseph had moved his family to Egypt. The descendants from Abraham had now grown to over 2 million. Not wanting to be overpowered by what he considered foreigners, Egypt's new Pharaoh had made them slaves. Through a series of strange events, a Hebrew boy named Moses became a

prince in Pharaoh's palace and then an outcast in the Sinai desert. God visited Moses in the mysterious flames of a burning bush, and after some discussion, Moses agreed to return to Egypt to lead God's people out of slavery. Pharaoh was confronted and through a cycle of plagues and promises, made & broken, the Israelites were rescued.

Managing and leading the masses was no easy task but God led them to freedom through the Red Sea which parted and through the desert guided by pillars of clouds and fire. God provided for their physical and spiritual needs with food called manna, enough for each day, and a place to worship -with the Ark of the Covenant in a tent. Despite continual evidence of God's love & power, the people complained and began to yearn for their days in Egypt & God judged their disobedience and unbelief. Eventually they were freed & it was to Moses that God gave the Ten Commandments.

Our Jewish brothers & sisters commemorate the miraculous exodus from Egyptian slavery each year at **Passover Pesach - 5-13 April 2023**

**Honing in now in the detail we have in today's passage** – it recalls the birth of Moses and how, by God's care and intervention, he survived.

The king of Egypt had ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill all the boy babies at birth to try and limit the population growth. But they disobeyed the King and let the male babies live. When confronted, they told the king that the Hebrew mothers were very strong and delivered their babies before they could get there.

**A Levite couple** (one of the 12 tribes of Israel), Jochebed & Amram (not named in story), had got married and had a boy. She cared for him for 3 months but kept him hidden – perhaps in her clothes etc. When she could hide him no longer, she got a tiny boat made from papyrus reeds which was water-proofed with bitumen tar, and just like the larger Nile River boats were made. She put the baby in it and put it among the papyrus reeds which grew 5ft tall on the banks of the river Nile where it would be protected and well insulated.

**His sister**, again not named but understood to be Miriam, stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

Then we learn that Pharaoh's daughter went down to the river to bathe. One of her attendants whilst walking by the riverbank noticed the basket among the reeds and summoned her female Israelite slave to get it. When

Pharaoh's daughter's Egyptian attendant opened it, she saw the baby crying she felt compassion towards him. This is one of the Hebrew babies she said.

Then Miriam, the baby's sister, asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you? Plucky kid! We don't know how old she was, but she was bright child and had worked out what was happening. She loved her baby brother. When told, yes, go, she went and fetched her mother, who, of course as also the mother of the baby that had been found.

**An arrangement was made** for the Israelite mother to wet-nurse the baby – for which she was paid – and so Miriam, her baby brother and mother all went home together, and the mother could continue to care for her children – she was also better off financially than before.

**The sting though,** for this mother, is in the last sentence of our reading – v10 When the child grew up. She brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, because, she said, "I drew him out of the water". It is this sting that connects with the next Bible reading.

An early example of wet nursing, fostering and adoption perhaps

### **Our noticings**

God's care and intervention in leading his people out of slavery into freedom

There's no limit on who God can use to work out his plan – using even children.

God's people – to have faith, believe and be obedient

### **Gospel reading Luke 2**

From the account of the presentation of Jesus as a young baby to the Temple by his parents Joseph & Mary. We have recently commemorated this occasion at Candlemas in early February.

**Just before** today's Gospel reading, we can read that Simeon, a righteous and devout older man in Jerusalem, full of the Holy Spirit, was waiting for the consolation of Israel. God, through the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

**Moved by the Spirit**, he'd gone into the courtyard that surrounded the Temple where he saw Mary & Joseph bring their one-month-old baby, their firstborn son, to present him to God. The ceremony included 'buying back' – redeeming – the child from God through an offering. This way the parents acknowledged that the child belonged to God, who alone has the power to give life.

When Joseph & Mary brought Jesus to the Temple to be consecrated to God, they met an old man who told them what their child would become. Mary & Joseph marvelled at what Simeon said about their baby: That he was a gift from God, the Messiah who would be a light to the entire world. Simeon prophesied that Jesus would have a paradoxical effect on Israel. Some would fall because of him, and others would rise. People would either joyfully accept Jesus for who he was or totally reject him. And his mother, Mary would be grieved by the widespread rejection Jesus would face, and of course his eventual death on the cross, for which she was present.

### **Our noticings**

In a sense the **child Moses was also redeemed** and enabled to be cared for by his mother - although in time, both Moses' mother and Jesus' mother would suffer the heartache of losing their child.

The faithfulness, patience & faith of Simeon.

The faithfulness & obedience of Mary & Joseph. Their amazement at what they heard. Her heart too, that would be broken.

**Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Church in Corinth** & all God's holy people throughout Achaia. The Romans had made Corinth the capital of Achaia – southern half of present-day Greece. The city was a flourishing trade centre due to its seaport and had developed a reputation as one of the most immoral cities in the ancient pagan world.

Into this environment Paul had visited Corinth on his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey and planted a church there (Acts 18). Perhaps it's not surprising that the church would be facing many pressures, conflicts, and divisions. These were distressing him and the people in the church.

Writing from Macedonia AD 55

**Paul's opening phrases:** Praises God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in our troubles so we can comfort those in any trouble.

This reading teaches & encourages us to seek solace from God: we read -

“So just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. If we are distressed, it is for our consolation and salvation. And this consolation produces endurance’.

**Many think that when God comforts us** our trouble should go away but this is not always the case. Receiving God's comfort also gives us the strength, encouragement, and hope that we need to keep going in difficult times. And the more we are comforted the more we can comfort others.

Paul reinforces this in his letter to the Romans – the church in Rome – where Paul also teaches that suffering produces endurance, hope and forms our Christian character.

Important learning in my own journey and faith. Just after I heard God's call to me to what understood was to ordained ministry, my mother, tragically died in a car accident. With other adversities along the way, I have learned to be comforted and strengthened by God. It's been 25 years from call to this point – God has been faithful and persistent and I have tried to be patient and obedient in my healing and preparation.

I have chosen this reading to be read at my Licensing service on Thursday. Do come and hear Bishop Langstaff preach on it.

**To finish then:**

**What do we notice about God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit, as a parent: caring, ever present, able to intervene in mysterious ways to fulfil his plan & purposes, which stretch over centuries and generations. We are all part of God's plan to share with others, God's action in the salvation of the world as we await the second coming of Christ and the New Jerusalem.**

**What is God teaching us today about our Christian faith: to lean on God, press in, learn to be comforted in times of sorrow.**

**How can we put our learnings into practice?** Whilst we don't want to bring on sufferings and difficult times to ourselves, we do share in Christ's suffering for us in them, and they form our character & develop the fruit of the Spirit in us: patience, endurance, peace & hope.

Whatever your circumstances today, may you be blessed, be comforted and be joyful, in God's love today.

Amen