

Mothering Sunday – March 10th

Exodus 2:1-10

Colossians 3:12-17

John 19:25b-27

How would you describe your mother?

I recognise that asking that simple question can be fraught with danger. There may be some here who have never known their mother; others whose relationship with their mother has been difficult or strained or non-existent. But I guess for many of us we have some – hopefully plenty – of good memories of our mothers.

Maybe the words with which we would like to describe our mothers are those that describe the characteristics all Christians should aspire to as written down by Paul in the letter to the Colossians that we heard this morning - *compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience*.

Perhaps some of you might like to share some of words that describe your mothers, those memories of your mothers - or of those people who have been like mothers to you - now

Our OT and Gospel readings today tell us stories of mothers at the beginning and at the end of their children's lives.

In our OT reading, Moses was born into a hostile world. The King of Egypt had decreed that all Israelite boys should be killed at birth by being thrown into the Nile; only girls could live. It seemed that this small baby Moses had no future.

But maternal instincts – as I am sure many of you know – are strong and loving and protective. Moses' mother – Jochabed (not named in this story but named elsewhere in scripture) – could not face seeing her child die. She hid him for 3 months, but knew she couldn't keep him hidden forever. What could she do?

She grasped at a slender hope – anything rather than seeing her son die. In a way she obeyed the king's instruction. She put Moses in the Nile, but in a basket, among the reeds. There might just be a chance. Perhaps a miracle would happen.

Her daughter Miriam watched to see what did happen. The baby was found by the king's daughter who had pity on the child. Miriam saw this and offered to find a wet nurse to care for him. She went to her mother – the mother of the very baby the princess had found - who hours after abandoning her child to the tiniest of hopes found herself feeding him in the king's palace – and even being paid to do so!

A happy ending – but what agonies Jochabed must have gone through as she thought about what had to happen, as she imagined the thought of her son dying; tears a plenty no doubt, but followed by joy. Yes, her child was no longer hers, but he was alive and she was part of his care and development. The miracle had happened.

And the gospel reading – part of the narrative we will read on Good Friday; the story of the crucifixion. Jesus dying a painful criminal's death. With his mother watching on.

What must she have been feeling? Her son in agonising pain in front of her; the recollection of the promises that she had heard from the angel Gabriel – how would they come true?; the words spoken by Simeon in the temple – a sword will pierce your soul too – were being lived out in front of her; the words she had heard Jesus say about the love and care we should have for each other – where was that love now? She no doubt pondered on the things she had seen, the love she had for her first born child, the tears she was no doubt crying. Unlike Jochabed, there was no way Mary could keep her son from death. And even as he was dying, Jesus saw her grief and sadness and perhaps utter despair and commended her to the beloved disciple John so that he could comfort her, and perhaps she could comfort him.

Two stories that show the depth of the love of two mothers. Two stories that show the deep emotions that come with mothering. Two situations that we all hope and pray we would never be in. Two stories of mothering.

Mothering. I always prefer the name Mothering Sunday to Mothers' Day. Mothering goes way beyond celebrating mothers. Mothering is something I hope we all have some kind of personal experience of, in both giving and receiving, regardless of our particular relationships with our own mothers or children.

Mothering – something that has its roots in the very character and essence of God.

And mothering has its roots in God because it is primarily about love and how love works out in practice and (as we read in the first letter of John) God is love.

Perhaps we can begin to imagine the depths of God's mothering instincts. Looking down at the cross; seeing the suffering of Jesus, the pain he was going through, the unfairness and injustice of it all. Looking down on the world. Seeing the suffering, the hatred, the pain. Children dying before they have had a chance to live; people – women and men created in God's image – being treated as if they were mere objects and treated like that by others created in God's image. The planet itself, designed and moulded and brought into being by the mothering hands of God abused and mistreated.

Mothering instincts eloquently described by Jesus as he looked over Jerusalem *"How many times I wanted to put my arms around all your people, just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not let me"*.

We often and rightly think about God as Father. That's the picture Jesus used. Those are the words with which the Lord's prayer begins of course. The Father picture with all the images that brings to mind of provider, strength and guide. But the motherly aspects of God are just as important. Nurturer, carer, healer, comforter to name a few. We should not forget these, nor allow the language we use to describe God to hide them. Perhaps every now and again it would do us no harm to think of God as our Mother – to remind us of these nurturing and comforting aspects of God's character. To enable us to have a fuller and clearer picture of God.

I am convinced that Paul had this full understanding of the character of God. Remember those words we were thinking about earlier from the letter to the Colossians - *compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience*. Paul urges us to clothe ourselves with these characteristics. To live them out and let them mould who we are.

These are – as we have seen – mothering words. We have used them to describe our own mothers and those who have been like mothers to us. Paul is urging us all to be more mothering; to imitate this part of God’s character. To show the mothering, caring, nurturing side of God to the world. To care for and bring comfort to a hurting world.

These are the very things we were looking at in our Lent readings and conversation groups this past week – how we can respond to human need by loving service. How we can be mothering in and to the world to help make the world a better place – make the world more like the way God always intended it to be. How we can show the motherly aspects of God to a hurting and suffering world.

Mothering Sunday – a day then to thank God for all who have mothered us; a day to recall the mothering nature of God; a day to clothe ourselves with those same mothering characteristics *compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience* as we seek to bring the love of God in its breadth and fullness to our homes, our neighbourhoods, our town, our nation and our world.