

All God's Children
Mothering Sunday; 27th March 2022

Luke 15:11-32

So, if you generally think of today as being Mothers' Day, it seems really strange to have strange to have a story about a Dad.

But originally today was known as Mothering Sunday – mothering as a verb, not mother as a noun. And although that term might seem a bit 'old fashioned' I'd like to make a claim for it being far more inclusive – and therefore up to date – than Mothers' Day.

Because it puts the focus back on to the act (or acts) of mothering, about what were traditionally, but are no longer, considered the role of the 'mother' - nurturing, caring, supporting, helping to grow. And quite rightly they are now considered the responsibility not just of one parent, but as part of being a good parent, irrespective of gender, and biological or otherwise.

So "Mothering" – looking out for, caring, nurturing, helping to grow....

In this morning's Gospel story we find a deeply loving parent "looking out for" their child, literally as well as metaphorically.

*"So he set off and went to his father. But **while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him...**"*

It's hard being a parent - you love your child so much, yet you have to let them grow into being themselves. And that's really hard for everyone!

And maybe for those of us who haven't been parents, we can look back through our adult eyes to how it was when we were children, and see how hard it was for our own parents. The child has to learn to make good choices. To learn that some things are harmful and need to be avoided (not putting your hand into the pretty flames of the fire springs to mind); and that others are important and need to be done even if we're not so keen (green veg anyone?)

But the truth is we don't always make good choices. Like the wandering son.

And yet – his Father still loved him. In a really active way – he was looking out for him.

And he welcomed him home.

Not for what he had done (or not done)

But because of who he was. Because he was his child.

And the story invites us to consider again that God is like that.

Generous.

Beyond generous.

This story has traditionally been called the Story of the Prodigal Son.

I always thought that Prodigal meant "lacking in moral fibre"

But it doesn't. It means recklessly extravagant.

And it seems to me that if we're going to use the word at all, we should call it "The Story of the Prodigal Parent."

The "Prodigal God", who loves recklessly, extravagantly.

Whose arms are always wide open to welcome us back, to welcome us closer in – whatever our history – whenever we choose.

The "Prodigal God" who loves all his children.

Which brings us neatly to the older son. The part of the story which is often missed out. I wonder why?

The younger son could see he'd got it wrong; but the older son – not so much.

Perhaps he was a bit too full of how good he was?

Perhaps rather judgemental of his younger brother? (I say this as an older sibling!)

There's quite a lot about him that's more like a business transaction than a loving relationship. Perhaps he rather thought that he had "earned" the right to be loved by his parent?

Maybe there's even a bit of a bargain in there? "If I do this..... then I will get that....."

"If I'm good, then I'll get good things."

Perhaps more about duty than the free flow of generosity that comes from being part of the family?

Especially *this* family.

With this father.

And yet his father still loved him too

Just as much as the younger brother. But the older one just couldn't see it. He was a bit stuck on the duty thing.

He wanted boundaries. Him in. Brother out.

Earning favour. "Earning his salvation", we might say. Plenty of people have a view of God like that. As a strict and demanding father, who needs to be 'kept sweet' otherwise something bad will happen.

Yet in the story, the Father explains gently that it doesn't work like that.

There is enough love for them both.

There is enough of God's love for all of us.

We don't know what happened to the older brother. I wonder if Jesus left it for us to write our own ending for him?

I'd like to think that the penny dropped, and he went in to the party, found the joy and the love and the laughter, and decided that he'd like some of that for himself.

And let go of the 'duty' attitude, and accepted the recklessly extravagant love of his father, just as his younger brother had done.

The younger son and the older one.

Both the Father's children.

Just as, whether we identify more with the younger son or the older one, when we accept that free, reckless extravagant love, we too join the party.

Because we are all God's children.