

Mothering Sunday

Today Mothering Sunday is a popular day when Christians choose to use the occasion to think about all things which concern motherhood. We give thanks for the Church as Mother, the Virgin Mary as the mother of Jesus, we remember that God cares for us like a mother and last but not least we give thanks for our own mothers. Mothering Sunday is the fourth Sunday in Lent and it is a time of special for thanksgiving. Sunday is the one day of joy in Lent, when flowers abound in all churches and when people are allowed a time off from the penitential season. It is also known as Mid-Lent Sunday, Refreshment Sunday or Laetare Sunday. The Latin name of Laetare, means rejoice.

Today we come to see the Fourth Sunday of Advent as a time to relax a little – lighten up – and we use this day to celebrate what the world has come to call ‘Mother’s Day’ – which is a wonderful thing to celebrate of course – we were all born of mothers - and if you are a mother and you have your children around you who share the spirit of the day with you then all is well.

But it is not like that for some – we are born of mothers but not everyone has had a blessed mothering experience – for some of us our mothers have sadly died and while we give thanks we miss them – some do not have a good relationship with their children and are estranged from them for one reason or another – and for others sadly, their children have died and today is about holding them on their hearts and memories and trusting that they are with us somehow and we keep their memory alive in our remembering – being grateful for the joy of having them in our lives but sad that they are not here today. And for some of us longed-for children haven’t worked out

But Mothering Sunday is what the church celebrates – the mothering of God’s children by God, our heavenly Father and Mother – with Jesus as mediator through God’s church and for us – through St Peter’s church,

And with that comes all sorts of hopeful possibilities to help us celebrate and be joyful but also to comfort us and assure us that while we might not have the conventional idea of Mother’s Day celebration – we are loved and nurtured in a motherly way by a loving God who knows us by name and draws us in to his love through Jesus in the power of his Holy Spirit.

In the fourteenth century Julian of Norwich, the first woman to write in modern English, experienced and understood the motherhood of God in her visions. Mothering Sunday is a good day to share her vision and recognise that although we are distinguished by our gender, God is not. Instead God is both mother and father to us .

Isaiah the prophet wrote

”As a mother comforts a child so will I comfort you, says the Lord.” (Isaiah 66.13)

And it is today’s story of baby Moses that we turn to as we think about a holy Mothering Sunday this year – the heaven on earth version.... It gives us a rich idea of how to think more widely about the blessings of today...

First of all it is a celebration of motherly love – that love that gives you the strength to let your child go because it is the best thing for them – just like Moses’ mother did. There are heroes in this story and they are all women – and Moses’ mother is the first – hiding him for three months in the Nile – and even acting as a feeding nurse for him even though he would go to someone else who he would call mother.

Next his sister kept watch over him and was the one who suggested his birth mother could nurse him – and the Pharaoh’s daughter – taking pity on him and finally adopting him.

Notice how none of the women are named – it is more about how God protects the child through the women

And that is the second thing we can take from the story of Moses. It helps us to see that idea of mothering is so much wider – we can show and receive motherly love in different ways by different people – with God’s love at the centre... Whether we adopted or are adopted – whether we care for other people’s children or are cared for by others – foster families – grandparents – childminders – nursery workers – school staff – valuable nurturing and caring coming from so many different sources.

Parenting too takes on many forms today – fathers who stay at home – grandparents – partners of new relationships who form relationships with their children – even our doctors, nurses, church leaders, scout and guide, cubs and brownie leaders – all who help to nurture us.

And what about that person who just knows when to say a comforting word or give a hug at the right time – how motherly is that?

God isn't in the business of conventional – Jesus showed us that – the ideal is not always the way it is – life gets in the way and circumstances are created – but love is the rescuer and strength and the measure of it all.

And this is where Sebastian helps me to illustrate that idea today of being rescued just like Moses was rescued by God's love.

We sometimes think of being rescued by helicopters if we need to get to hospital quickly – or are in a boat that's in trouble – or by fire engines if we have a fire to be put out

But there are other ways we need rescuing – and Moses was first rescued from the threat of being killed – to grow up to be the rescuer of thousands of God's people who escaped oppression in Egypt.

So rescuing is more than the helicopters and fire engines – it is also a motherly act of kindness – taking a moment to listen out – to keep a look out for people who are in trouble – either in physical trouble or troubled in their heart or their mind...

God's rescue plan is about love and light – and Mothering Sunday is a way to celebrate one way that God does that – through motherly love...

When Jesus unites his friend John with his own mother Mary – he brings a new family to birth through his loving care of his friend and mother, and the family he establishes is the family that's here today...the Church community

And it is In this family, we can remember our own stories that are attached to this day – our wider church family – and give thanks because as well as celebrating the secular day of Mother's Day with all the trimmings - and that's right and lovely to - we go one step beyond that and celebrate Mothering Sunday – a celebration for all those who mother us, women, men and children – those who care for us, who teach us and help us to grow.

We celebrate today our special people – whoever they are – and we can ask God to help us to share his work of mothering – to be special motherly people for others – just like Moses' story showed us and and just like Jesus showed us – caring and sharing, giving and receiving – it's what makes the world go round – and what gives us special meaning to our lives.

And here I have a Mothering Sunday card for us all – I'll read it. It says:

Mothering Sunday blessings to us all – with love from God, your heavenly mother – and father – and friend.... Amen.

Rev Jacqueline Drake-Smith

Mothering Sunday – March 2021