

Mothering Sunday - 14th March 2021

Ex 2:1-10; John 19:25b-27

'It is extraordinary what God has done!'

Anyone who has read Scripture, either in words or in images, can agree with this statement. This may be because there are two levels of understanding; the first concerns the mundane, the events of everyday life being lived, in its cyclical nature. And then there is the eternal, the joyful motherlode of treasure, just waiting for those with open hearts and minds...

Happy 'Mothering Sunday' to you all; the whole congregation of three daughter churches. 'Daughter churches' because we are in relationship with 'Mother Church', the world-wide fellowship of Christians who, on this 4th Sunday of Lent are keeping 'Laetare' or 'Rejoicing' Sunday. In the middle of Lent disciplines, Mothering Sunday is a welcome breather.

Over time, the day has become known as 'Mother's Day' and it is indeed good to stop and reflect on how thankful we are for our Mother, Mum, Mummy BUT... for many reasons 'Mother's Day' can be difficult. Add in the pandemic year and we all feel...bereft. Many of us have either not been able to see, let alone hug, our Mums or close family members or we have spent too much time in close proximity and need to break away, struggling with deep emotions and feelings which are hard to express. This is even more true if we have experienced a dear Mum's or partner's illness or death. How close to the surface run such feelings...

With this in mind, I invite you to participate, yes, you did hear that correctly, participate in two reflections on this morning's readings. You will need your imaginative and/or listening skills, so we'll take a moment to clear our minds and take a deep breath before we begin.

Moses' older sister was called Miriam. Imagine you are her, a young sister, as you move along with her in the story. If that is impossible, just listen closely as she speaks. Sometimes, closing your eyes helps with this.

'I remember it as if it was yesterday. We were God's people living in Egypt but were trapped there, living as slaves who had to work around the clock for our Egyptian masters. They called us names, worked us too hard, and sometimes hit us to make us work even harder. I was just a little girl then so I didn't have to work, but I saw the way my people, the Israelites, were treated and I was very sad. We prayed for God to help us, to look after us and set us free. For a while I managed to be happy as Mum had just had a baby, a boy, and I loved him. I followed Mum round the house, watching how she cared for him. But Mum was still sad. One day she explained why. My beautiful little brother wasn't safe. The Egyptians wanted to take away all our little boys, to stop us from getting powerful. Mum said she was frightened. And then I was sad and frightened again, too. The next day Mum was smiling again. She had been praying and now

she had a plan; she needed my help! Together, we found a basket big enough for a baby and we made sure the water couldn't get in. Then Mum said it was all down to me. If she left the house people would see, but I was small enough to hide in the plants along the river and follow the basket to make sure our baby was safe and found by someone who could look after him. I cried so much when I put the basket in the water. That was my brother. We wanted to keep him with us, but the best way to look after him was to let him go. So, now it was down to me, and whomever God would send, to keep him safe for us. I was so scared! The river was fast and full of animals, but somehow God kept our baby safe. After what seemed like the whole day, the basket reached a part of the river where the King of Egypt's daughter was swimming. My stomach turned over. My heart was in my mouth. An Egyptian Princess had seen the basket! But it turned out God had sent her. She was kind and took the baby home, even though she knew what type of boy he was. She gave him the name Moses, which means 'pulled out of the water' or 'saved', because he was! Although I was very frightened, I stepped forward – as if I had just been passing – and said I knew someone who could feed the baby if she needed help. My Mum! So, Mum got her baby back and looked after him until he was old enough to become part of the King of Egypt's family. God was watching over him, and of course, helping me, Mum and the King's daughter. God kept Moses safe because he had important things to do in the future. Just imagine if we hadn't been there to help God look after him... the story would have turned out very differently.'

According to this re-telling, Miriam's Mother's role was to pray, to let go and to trust God, without knowing the whole story, as well as relying entirely on her young daughter.

How hard it must have been for Mary to have had the perfect son...

'When Jesus was born, I was young, inexperienced and ostracised because of his conception. He was born far from my home in difficult and dangerous surroundings. I took Jesus to the temple, only 8 days old, and heard Simeon's prophecy. I heard Simeon tell me that a sword would pierce my soul. This happened, for the first time, as soon as we became refugees, escaping the King who wanted to kill my baby!

Jesus was different from other children. At 12 he stayed behind in Jerusalem to discuss theology! When he was older still, his peers were getting married and having children, obligatory for a Jew. It was not easy for me to have Jesus, unmarried and living at home. Jesus' public ministry alienated him still further from us, as well as from our local religious leaders. I learned to constantly put my own feelings aside and support him. Finally, I suffered the worst thing that can happen to a mother; I had to watch my son die a long, painful, tortuous

death. But I was there, I don't know how, but I was there, supporting Jesus when he asked John to become my son and me to become John's Mother. Such love!

[Pause]

With thanks to the Children's Society for these adapted versions.

According to this re-telling, Mary prayed in many uncertain situations. She knew how to watch and to wait, learning how to bear each new twist and turn of that sword. She put her feelings aside at all times, she was enabled to let go and to trust God without knowing the whole story, leaning on those around her for love and support and, eventually, to welcome Jesus' new role for her as John's Mother. Such love indeed!

As a small part of the much wider, broader, deeper Mother Church, we have reflected on the joys and the deep sorrows of two Mothers' experiences. So, as we draw on our own experiences of Mothering Sundays, let us be deeply grateful to God for the loving-kindness, grace and unchanging faithfulness shown in sending us Jesus, the Son, the Christ. It is indeed extraordinary what God has done!

Prayer for Today:

God made known in the strength and vulnerability of birth, the joy and pain of motherhood, in nights of sleepless love and inner ocean's flow, in demands without number and questions without answer: give us gratitude for the women who carried us, for the carers who nurture us and for the chance to pass on life, through Jesus Christ, Mary's Child. Amen.