

Mothering Sunday 2020

There are a number of choices of readings for today. These felt appropriate.

Exodus 2.1-10

A man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him for three months. When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him. The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him, 'This must be one of the Hebrews' children,' she said. Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?'

Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Yes.' So the girl went and called the child's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.' So the woman took the child and nursed it. 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.'

2 Corinthians 1.3-7

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering. Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.

John 19. 25b-27

Standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

Reflection

On Mothering Sunday we give thanks for mothers and those who mother in different ways. Mothers everywhere have always needed our prayers as they juggle work and family commitments, but this year they need them even more as schools close and families worry about money and food supplies.

On any normal Mothering Sunday, many families would be getting together and giving gifts and cards. Most mothers love to see their children come home and gather round their table. And the same is true of Mother Church. She loves nothing better than for her children to gather round the Lord's table. Sadly, this year that is not possible. Many mothers are separated from their children and church services have been suspended. So we need to find different ways to connect as members of God's family. And as usual, the scriptures can provide some inspiration.

The story of God's people in Egypt from the time of Joseph in Genesis through to the Exodus is often read at morning prayer during Lent and I recommend it to you for the coming weeks. In today's episode we have arrived at the birth of Moses in very difficult circumstances. The Israelites in Egypt have become so numerous that Pharaoh has decided to kill all Hebrew baby boys. Like any mother, Moses' had a fierce desire to keep him alive. Her first instinct must have been to keep him close, but she recognised that this put him in greater danger. So she placed him in a basket and hid it among the reeds, and told his older sister Miriam to keep an eye on him. At this time of fear and anxiety, our natural instinct is to want to be together with those we love. But in order to do what we can to combat this disease, many of us need to isolate ourselves

physically from family members and others. The most vulnerable are not babies like Moses but the elderly and those with underlying health issues. We will need to find new ways to stay connected, through greater use of the telephone and internet, just as Moses' mother had to be creative in her time.

When Pharaoh's daughter came to bathe in the river and discovered Moses, she recognised him as a Hebrew child. But instead of handing him over to her father she took Moses as her son. She even paid his mother to be his nurse. This is a wonderful story of women subverting patriarchal power. But it also reminds us that the people who mother us are not just those who gave birth to us. Several women helped to keep Moses alive. And while families are separated over the coming weeks, more than ever we will need to care for those around us. To be children to those whose children are far away and to be mothers and fathers to those whose parents cannot see them.

And this is also the implication of our Gospel reading. There are usually only two Gospel readings provided for Mothering Sunday (John 19.25b-27 or Luke 2.33-35). Both highlight the potential cost of motherhood and have always seemed rather grim readings for this day. But this year the reading from John seems apt. As Jesus was dying on the cross, he thought of his mother. Not in the sense many of us would, of wanting our mothers to come and save or comfort us in our hour of need. But as a son who wanted his mother to be cared for after he had gone. Jesus gives his mother Mary into the care of John, the beloved disciple, and tells them that they are now mother and son. We too may need to include others in our families, if only for a while.

Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians reminds us that whatever faces us, we are not alone. As Christians we know that God is with us always. As Paul puts it, he consoles us in all our afflictions so that we can console others in theirs. While observing all necessary precautions, we need to bear one another's burdens, holding them in prayer, keeping in touch and helping where we can.

Moses the baby grew into Moses the man, who led his people out of Egypt through the Red Sea. The Exodus became the formative event of the Jewish people which is still remembered at Passover. Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection on Easter morning became our Passover, the central event for Christians everywhere. It may be some time before we are able to gather again to celebrate Easter fully but we will

eventually. In the meantime, we need to be stand near the foot of the cross like Mary. We need to remain faithful, trusting that new life and resurrection will one day come.

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