



THOUGHTS FOR MOTHERING SUNDAY MORNING
22 MARCH 2020

A Woman's Tender Care
John 9

Contrary to what some (the Vicar?) seem to think, I did have a mother, a fact to which many of you who met her can testify, and so I feel as well, or as little, qualified as anyone to speak on Mothering Sunday.

Although I loved her well, and, which is not the same thing, liked her a lot, when I was small she, always present, represented much more of a 'parental figure' than my shift-working father, who was, perhaps, the more consoling of the two. I remember once being with my mother in the haberdashery department of the C&A Modes shop in Sheffield. It was before I started school and I was quite short and unable to see over the high counter. Mother had let go of my hand, probably to try on a pair of gloves, and somehow I got carried away in the crowd of shoppers round the corner of the display, and out of her sight; more importantly, from my viewpoint, was that she was out of my sight. I let go a terrified screech (not much changes there) and strange women began to tend to me, an experience more frightening than feeling myself to be lost. Mother, who, in all likelihood, knew exactly where I was, rescued me from the melee very quickly and quieted me down, but I never did think she evidenced the appropriate remorse for her desertion, and rather thought my father would never have allowed such a thing to happen.

When, sometime later, I became familiar with William Cowper's hymn, which begins, *Hark, my soul, it is the Lord*, I was very struck by the stanza:

*Can a woman's tender care
Cease toward the child she bare?
Yes, she may forgetful be,
Yet will I remember thee.*

The fact is that, though most mothers the world over live most of their lives in selfless devotion to their children, they can sometimes be forgetful, and we hear of such falls from grace in the news and shake our heads in disapproval. But that is not the point that Cowper is making. He is pointing out that, though human beings, mothers in this case, can fail in their constant love, God's love for us is utterly constant and reliable. This is a remarkable claim – we take the most loving, most nurturing human relationship we routinely encounter – that of a mother for her child – and recognise that it is but a pale shadow of the relationship God has with us. It is an astonishing claim, but one that we overlook, partly because of familiarity and partly because we don't always really believe it, or feel it to be true. But it remains at the heart of the Christian message – God so loved the world – every part of it, including you and me – that he sacrificed his Son – his very self – so that we might have everlasting life.

Although we honour mothers in particular today, what we are really honouring is the nurturing rôle, the loving, self-sacrificing rôle that not only enhances life, but, we might say, is what makes life worth living, and which has about it the nature of the divine.

At this present time of pestilence crisis there is an urgent need to manifest just such nurturing, such selfless care. We see it in the devotion of the medics and all those others who are giving of themselves to secure the well-being of those who are ill and afraid, but we cannot have too much of it, and we all have our part to play. So as we give thanks today for our mothers and for all mothers, we thank God as well for his love towards us and pledge ourselves, mothers, fathers, women and men, to follow Jesus and be God's agents of caring in our world today.

Clive Lemmon