

Mothering Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2021 – Julie Barham

Exodus 2:1 -10, Luke 2:33 – 35.

Happy Mothering Sunday! It's probably a very different day from most celebrations of this event and some of you will be hoping that cards got through in time, or plotting to phone offspring later on when they have forgotten to phone you!

Some of you may be sitting there grumbling, saying that it's all too commercialized. Others may be feeling sad, as their mothers are no longer here, or even that they have never been mothers, or parents. Or there has been a tragic loss. Either way, they have, we may have, complex feelings about Mothering Sunday. We can appreciate it as an historical celebration, when traditionally servants were allowed time off to visit their families. We can appreciate it as a day of refreshment in Lent, a day off if you like, when some of the rigours of Lent can be relaxed. Or it can be a trying day, full of memories. So, a complicated time, of memories, of gratitude, and maybe some sadness.

Our first reading today, from the OT book of Exodus, retells a story that many of us remember from childhood, even if like me you never darkened the door of a church. I think it reflects the determined love of a mother, a parent, who has given a lot of thought to how to save her child, and we can believe that the good fortune which attended her was God given.

The Egyptians have decided that the slave class, the Israelites, are growing too fast. So the order goes out to kill the baby boys. Moses' mother, who I think is tentatively named Jochebed, makes a special waterproof basket in which to place her precious baby boy, and floats him off down the Nile, watched by his older sister. We do not know if she had thought to do so when the Pharaoh's daughter was bathing there, but either way she finds the baby, and sends the big sister to find a nurse for him. His mother is nearby, and therefore gets to bring her own son up, the newly named Moses. Happy times all around, and we know that Moses grows up to be a special man of God, obeying his will and leading an entire people to begin a new life.

Of course there would have been other people, mothers, fathers, families, mourning their losses. Throughout Moses' life there would be those who suffered, even died, partly as a result of Moses' actions, and so complications and contradictions would be known.

We know that our world is full of complications and contradictions, great joy and happiness, as well as suffering and loss. The past year has made us re-think our relationships within families and with our friends in so many ways; absence may make the heart grow fonder, but it can also be very painful. There are no easy answers to the situation of lockdowns and associated difficulties, but we can give thanks for the vaccines, and those who have developed and administered them.

The Gospel reading is also about contradictions. The elderly Simeon takes the baby Jesus in his arms and says to Mary that while he is dedicated to the glory of God, this baby will bring her great suffering and pain. That isn't a very cheerful message for new parents or indeed anyone. We know what would happen on the Thursday, Friday and indeed the Sunday of what we might call Holy Week, Mary and Joseph didn't. We know about all the hope that would come into the world as a result of that first Easter, but Mary would still have to go through that process.

There are many models of being a parent in the Bible. Hannah features in the alternate reading for today, as a woman who gives her baby to God in a special way. Then there is the mother of the disciples, possibly the first recorded pushy mother, who asks Jesus for a seat on the high table for her sons when he comes into his kingdom. Many of these mothers, parents are grateful to God for their children, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they always know what to do.

So, in world that is increasingly complex, increasingly challenging, what can an ancient book tell us about being a mother, being a parent, being human? How on earth can we begin to deal with a year like we've had?

I think a lot will be achieved if we can look and understand the basics. When asked about the most important commandment, Jesus said that the most important were to love God, and love our neighbour as ourselves. What we need, food, shelter and security, is what everyone needs. In a frightening world, in so many ways, we the sort of love that makes a difference to lives.

On Mothering Sunday, we are reminded to think especially about Mothers. Today let's also think about all those whose bravery, compassion and love have made a difference in our lives, and the lives of others. And pray for ourselves as we try to be the difference that we want to see in our world. Amen.