

Sermon – 14<sup>th</sup> March 2021 - The Fourth Sunday of Lent – ‘Mothering Sunday’  
Exodus 2:1-10, John 19:27 - Rev’d Carol Harley

*May my words be true to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Mothering Sunday is a time when Christians particularly think about all the things related to motherhood. We give thanks for our own mothers as well as thinking of all the biblical mothers especially Mary the mother of Jesus and we remember that God cares for us like a mother.

Isaiah wrote: *‘As a mother comforts a child so will I comfort you, says the Lord.’* It is a special day of joy in amongst the journey of Lent. God loves us as a parent and knows the deepness of the emotions; joy, sadness, disappointment, compassion, pain, hope, pride, to name but a few that can be held in a parent’s heart.

Mothering Sunday marks the half way point in our journey through Lent. Today we celebrate the fact that God created us out of Love and that we become fully alive human beings in the midst of relationship of love. In particular our readings today encourage us to celebrate the bond of love of mothers for their children and children for their mothers.

I am sadly well aware that not everyone will have had experiences of motherhood or childhood which were positive and that Mothering Sunday may be a difficult time for some. If today is a difficult time for you then we can offer our sadness in prayer to God as well as our happiness, as we are each first and foremost all children of God.

Today’s reading from Exodus is the story of Moses in the basket which is a story which most of us have been familiar with since childhood. It is a wonderful story of a mother’s protective love for her child but like most Bible stories that we learnt as children, there is always more to the story than we first appreciate.

To put the story into context it’s a story set in ancient Egypt at the time of the Pharaohs and there had been an increasingly large Hebrew community living in Egypt since the time that Joseph (he of the many coloured coat), had been sold into slavery by his brothers. However as the generation passed Joseph was forgotten and the community of Hebrews grew and a new Pharaoh became afraid that this ethnic minority was becoming too big to control.

First he put the Hebrews into slavery and then he ordered that all male babies be killed at birth by the midwives, (I’m sorry this is quite difficult to hear on Mothering Sunday) but it does get better because this is when a female resistance conspiracy kicks in. First the midwives deliberately failed to carry out the order, God rewarded these brave women with families of their own.

When this plan didn’t work either, Pharaoh ordered that all male babies be thrown into the Nile, and that brings us to the starting point of our reading from Exodus this morning. Moses’ mother gave birth to him and hid him away from the authorities for three months but as he became bigger and noisier he became more difficult to hide.

Eventually Moses' mother decided to hide baby Moses amongst the reeds in the Nile at exactly the place Moses' mother would be able to see him. She made a waterproof basket and placed him amongst the bulrushes where she knew he could be found and had her older daughter watch over the basket to make sure it was alright.

But, we might ask, how did she know that the baby would be found? Well Pharaoh's daughter came down to the Nile to bathe each day, and I imagine it wouldn't be a random time but, rather, it probably happened either morning or evening and everyone would know where and when it took place. It certainly seems as though Moses' mother knew exactly what she was doing and that she meant Moses to be found by Pharaoh's daughter.

When the baby was rescued by Pharaoh's daughter she realised the baby's ethnic identity and immediately said "this is one of the Hebrew babies". Moses' sister who had watched over the basket while it was hidden in the reeds, approached Pharaoh's daughter and offered to get a Hebrew woman to wet-nurse the baby. Of course she fetches Moses' mother and Pharaoh's daughter pays her to wet-nurse Moses until he was old enough to be taken into the palace. What an amazing story of a mother's love for her child.

Our Gospel Reading today shows that even as Jesus hung on the cross he was concerned that his mother would be secure following his death and he commended Mary into the care of his beloved disciple. We know that Christ's love went much further than that of his mother and as Christians we should not forget that our call to be persons of love is much more radical than just loving our immediate family. St. Paul tells the Colossians that as God's chosen ones we should "clothe ourselves in love", and elsewhere we are told to "love neighbours as ourselves". We know from the parables that our neighbour doesn't just include those who love us it includes our enemies and those who are profoundly different from us.

Thinking back to the story of Moses in his basket placed safely in the bulrushes by his mother, she acted bravely and cleverly out of love to save her son. I wonder though if it was the midwives and Pharaoh's daughter who showed the more radical love to which we are called to as Christians – they risked retribution from the Pharaoh to save children who were not their own and, in the case of Pharaoh's daughter to save the life of a child from another race that had been condemned to death by her own father.

This love didn't show itself only in saving Hebrew boys but it involved action and even possibly money to ensure the poor were looked after. That is Christian love. We should love our children and our parents but we should not forget our call to offer love in practical ways and to other people's children and parents, even if those are very different to ourselves.

Let us pray these words from the New Testament, "and whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, give thanks to God the Father through him".

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*