

Lent 4, Mothering Sunday, CCW

6th March 2016

Exodus 2 v1-10

Psalm 34 v11-20

Luke 2 v33-35

To Make a Difference

I hope you able to say or receive 'Happy Mothers' Day' with true peace and contentment.

I'm not sure the players in our readings today would have. These are strange passages to have to celebrate Mothering Sunday, to celebrate one of the most basic of human relationships, simple yet somehow indefinable, with two accounts of the most bizarre actions and encounters with mothers in the whole of human history.

The story of Moses in the Bulrushes retells the extremes that Jochebed, Moses' mother, went to to protect him from the vicious anger of Pharaoh who had forgotten why the Israelites were part of his kingdom and only saw them as a threat - so forcing them into slave labour to stop them from growing in power and rising in revolt; the irony of Moses being brought up in safety by his own mother and then adopted into the household of Pharaoh, which only proved to be a continuation of his problems.

Then we have the reading from Luke, Simeon's Song, which was addressed to his mother, Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many ... to be a sign that will be opposed ... and a sword will pierce your own soul too.' Neither of these stories could really be celebrated as Happy Mothers' Day, could they?

Because both of these are stories of sacrifice and redemption. Sacrifice, because Moses' mother had to give up her son to protect him – if she hadn't given him up Moses would have been killed and lost forever to both his family and the nation of Israel. And redemption because through this little baby God would lead the Israelites out of captivity in Egypt and fulfil the promise made to Abraham that the nation of Israel would be a blessing to *all* nations.

God's plan was not the clear-cut, direct plan sort of plan that any logical human would have mapped out: God plan was different even from the earliest times. Even though Moses' family had to be split apart, God had everything in control.

God creates and God redeems. It is not His will that any of His creation should be lost. Time and time again we read in the Bible how God interacts with His creation to bring us close to Himself, ultimately sacrificing His own Son, Jesus, as Simeon prophesied. Again, the sacrifice and redemption – 'a sign that will be opposed' and a 'sword to pierce your own soul.' I'm sure this is not what Mary expected when she and Joseph took Jesus into the temple as law-abiding Jews to fulfil the ultimate Jewish covenant of circumcision. Simeon prophesied that Jesus would have a paradoxical effect on Israel – some would fall because of him; other would rise. Simeon prophesied that there would be no neutral ground where Jesus was concerned – people would either accept that he was the expected Messiah or totally reject him. God's plan was to make a difference.

Just like the nativity of Jesus, the nativity of Moses tells a great story. Each of the characters has his/her own story to tell about this baby who would come to be known as Moses. Each one would play their part in God's plan to save His long suffering people, the first outworking of one of God's promises to Abraham, that they would become a numerous people. This was too much for Pharaoh who tried his own version of 'population control', but God's plan would not be deterred by any earthly ruler. Through the sacrifice of one mother, a tyrant's daughter would be the agent of redemption for a whole nation, and eventually for all people. It is interesting to note that the main players in this story are all women, and it is the women who subvert Pharaoh's plan to suppress a people. It is interesting to note that Simeon addresses Mary, an insignificant female, about the awesome destiny of her son. God dealt with that family differently.

On Mothering Sunday we celebrate all the positives that families experience: love, happiness, togetherness, but we also need to remember that there might be pain, sacrifice and loss. Not all

families are the same. I'm sure we all have different experiences of childhood and some of us of parenthood too and many of us are aware of others' vastly different experiences. Being a part of God's church means we are all one family under Christ, who has redeemed us from our brokenness and is making us whole so we, the church, can all be an example and a blessing to the world.

We may be able to rejoice in the love that we have found within our families and in the security and strength of our own mother's love. Some of us may be able to reflect on the horror felt by Jochebed and Mary at the plans that they were driven to or heard foretold about their own sons. But unfortunately, there are many people today who have not had the chance to experience that sort of love that would go to any extreme for them.

I have known people who even still in their teens know nothing about the security of parental love nor have experienced anything like the care or concern we hear in either of these readings, as extreme as they are. These are people, children, who have nothing on which to base any experience of love and so cannot love others or even themselves. When you talk to these children about God, there is nothing in their lives on which to even hang the idea of being loved just because you exist, so the idea of a loving, creator God is an alien and inexplicable concept.

The children I speak of may well be extremes. But think of what some of those children in the current migrant camps feel like – sent away from any kind of family structure out of a true sense of love because they are safer in the rotting squalor of the jungle in Calais than they were at home. That is the cost of true love – sacrifice.

Lent reminds us that we have to respond to the love of God shown in Jesus, which ultimately led him to death on the cross. Here is a love that we can never begin to repay, but if we are serious about following Jesus, there is a cost involved. What is this cost? In one sense, the cost is nothing because the love of God is free to all through grace but, incredibly, as is often the case with God, this is

turned upside down and it should actually cost us our all because it is a price worth paying for it leads to eternal life in a right relationship with our creator.

So what is the role of God's family, the church, in these sorts of realities? Are we / are you being called on to sacrifice something – time, talents, money – in order that God's relationship with humanity today is made clear and real? This Mothering Sunday could be an opportunity to reconsider how we as a church family could reach families locally as different from our own as they might be and also to play our part in the world-wide family to share God's love and grace and experience, perhaps for the first time, the difference it can make.