

Reflection for Mothering Sunday 2020

The events of these past few days have brought a sense of unreality to everyday life. The Spring Equinox on Friday would usually have us rejoicing in the beauty of the signs of new life in the natural world and Mothering Sunday would see us in our Chapel service sharing out bunches of spring flowers and reminding ourselves of the love of God that we find in each other.

At this time many are scared to be outside for fear of being contaminated by the coronavirus and the measures taken to protect ourselves mean that all public worship has been suspended, so we cannot meet as we would wish to and celebrate our shared life.

Mothering Sunday has to a large extent been taken over by “Mother’s Day”, something altogether different, and so it is good to remind ourselves of what Mothering Sunday really means.

It is a celebration of the “Mothering” that we receive from the Church, so called because the tradition was that those who worked away from home would go back on this day to their “Mother” church and their family taking with them a small gift for their Mother.

In our modern age, the emphasis on the role of the mother alone can be painful for so many due to painful memories of lost dreams or fractured relationships or death of a loved one or a feeling of being forgotten. It is important, therefore, for the Church to reclaim what the “Mothering” is that the church can and does offer to so many and the role that we each as members of the Chapel family have to play in it.

Our readings today are an excellent reminder of our membership of a family that is so much more than we can fully appreciate.

Firstly, we have the well known story from the book of Exodus of the baby Moses in the bulrushes. The family of Israel had grown numerous and strong and had lived for many years peacefully in the land of Egypt. They had become settled there after their ancestor Joseph had steered the Egyptian nation through a severe famine but

as memories of this had faded and leadership had changed there came a jealousy and a fear of these “aliens” living and thriving in Egypt. The Pharaoh of the time ordered therefore that all male Hebrew children born should be killed to stop the growth of the Israelites.

The Hebrew child Moses was born and hidden away by his mother until he was three months old. It would have been hard to hide a growing, crying child and instead his mother made a basket out of bulrushes and placed the child in it and asked his sister to keep watch to see what would happen to the child. When Pharaoh’s daughter came down to the river to bathe, she saw the basket, heard the child cry and adopted him as her son.

It is quite clear from the text that Pharaoh’s daughter knew that this was a Hebrew child, a member of the oppressed and feared race. Perhaps it was the appearance of the child, the colour of his hair or skin, or the cloth that he was wrapped in. Certainly, the clothes that the child’s sister was wearing would have made it plain who and what they were. And yet this did not deter Pharaoh’s daughter from this act of mercy and compassion on taking the child in and giving him all that being brought up as one in the royal household could offer.

I wonder whether the eyes of the mother of Moses and the daughter of Pharaoh met as Moses was given life through her kindness. Did the Egyptian know the story of Joseph and felt that the regime of oppression was unconscionable or was it simply that her heart melted at the sight of the child. Whatever it was, she took risks to give Moses life and without her action the story of God’s people would look very different.

Our second reading is from the Gospel of John, a depiction of the scene as Jesus was dying on the cross and his close family and friends were standing near watching. It is hard to imagine the pain and distress of the scene. A mother watching her child die a painful death, a son seeing the agony on his mother’s face as he struggles to

breathe. It would have been noisy with the jeering of the crowd, the shouting of the soldiers and the weeping of the women.

In the moments of his death, Jesus looks with love and compassion on his mother and his friend John. He remembers that as a son and a good Jew he has a duty to care for the widow and he gives his mother to his friend to care for.

This is perhaps not as straightforward as it seems as elsewhere in the gospels we are told that Jesus has brothers. What would they think of his words from the cross? They may well have died and so it is as simple as making sure that his mother would have a family to care for her.

But it feels as if there is something much greater at work here. In his death and resurrection Christ opens up God's love in a way that has no boundaries, familial or physical, national or spiritual. Somehow he redefines what it means to be a family.

This is a sobering message at any time but one that has particular relevance for these times that we find ourselves in.

Church (or Chapel) is not just about caring for those we find within its walls whom we have come to know and love. It is about recognising that all are made in the image of God and all are members of the family of God. The church should be the place where we are nurtured and cared for and sustained as we go out to nurture and care for others. As we are mothered so we mother others.

In this time of isolation and anxiety we need to demonstrate our love. We may not be able to be physically with someone, to hold their hand or tell them in person how much they matter. But we can all pick up the phone or write a letter. Those of us who are younger or in better health can offer to run errands. We can all be mindful of each other and pray for each other.

I have been struck by the offers of help and messages of support I have received. My prayer is that we each in these coming days and

weeks may be able to show to others the breadth of God's family and the depth of God's love.

Amen