

Sermon for Mothering Sunday, 22 March 2020

Opening Prayer

God of love:

Today, many of us find ourselves denied the opportunity to express our love for all those who mother us...Help us to appreciate that your love extends beyond all human constraints of time and place...And that each one of us is held tenderly in your care this day, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Readings

Exodus 2.1-10

The Birth of Moses

2 Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman, 2 and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. 3 But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket[a] for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. 4 His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

5 Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. 6 She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said.

7 Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?"

8 "Yes, go," she answered. So the girl went and got the baby's mother. 9 Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So the woman took the baby and nursed him. 10 When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses,[b] saying, "I drew him out of the water."

Simeon addresses Mary in the Temple

33 The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

We find ourselves in an unusual situation this week. Few still alive today have anything more than fleeting childhood memories of war time. Many more, of course, remember the reality of rationing that lasted well into the 1950s. All of us though, are now experiencing emotions that seem to resonate with that age long ago when all the usual expectations about life and community were turned upside down. It is a strange time and no one knows when life will return to normal or what life will look and feel like when it does.

At the very moment when community life is put on hold, community spirit emerges afresh, and new ways of being community begin to spring forth with ever greater energy and creativity. The words of Isaiah come to mind: *Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.* We need to keep alert that even in the most difficult of times God's love and light will shine through. What is God already enabling in our communities just when everything we have grown accustomed to has ceased? Are our hearts open to the possibility that God can work through COVID-19 for the benefit of the church and community?

That theme of creativity and imagination is a wonderful one for Mothering Sunday when we remember both those who have mothered us down the years and also our Mother Church that has enriched our lives so beautifully.

Our first reading today – the story of the birth of Moses – Exodus 2.1-10 - is a wonderful story to be reflecting upon at this time. If we think our times are difficult, spare a thought for Moses' Mum faced with the edict from Pharaoh to kill her son by throwing him in the Nile. The current restrictions on our lives are a long way from the terror with which she faced each day as her son outgrew her ability to keep him hidden.

But Moses' Mum was creative. She found a way to comply with the law – placing Moses in a basket – and she found a way to keep him safe – placing the basket amongst the reeds where it couldn't be blown downstream.

Moses' sister, who we know from elsewhere in the Bible is called Miriam, had clearly inherited her Mother's wisdom. She watches what happens, intervenes when the Pharaoh's daughter discovers the child, and offers to find a nursing mother to care for the baby on her behalf. No prizes, of course, for guessing who Miriam goes off to find. Mother and baby are reunited and Moses grows up to lead the people of Israel to the promised Land.

Here is a story of faithfulness, love and commitment, but also a story of cunning, wisdom, creativity and courage.

All of these sentiments are relevant today as we give thanks for all who have embraced us in the love of motherhood; but they are also values that each of us needs today as we adjust our lives to the reality of living alongside COVID-19.

Our response to this challenge needs us to show faithfulness, love and commitment to one another, and we need courage, wisdom and creativity to come up with new ways of being church and community in the current climate. We need Moses' Mum and her daughter Miriam, like never before.

None of this is going to be easy – as Simeon hints to Mary in those immortal words – “And a sword will pierce your own soul too.” Simeon clearly did not perceive in Mary a street wise Mum who had any inkling at all that life was going to be tough for Jesus and for her. How do you tell that to someone?

Honesty is sometimes very hard to express and so we resort to euphemism, hints, invitations to read between the lines. No one wants to hear bad news, but sometimes, truth now is better than drip-feeding uncertainty. We've watched with mostly understanding I think as politicians have tried to explain to us just how serious this virus is. I wonder how many politicians are pleased they didn't get elected now? Victory brings responsibility, and many want the former without needing to exercise the latter.

So, for now we are all battening down the hatches. But whilst we might be withdrawing into our homes a little, we mustn't withdraw into ourselves. We need one another.

This week, please...

- Telephone someone who won't be expecting to hear from you and just have a chat
- Look out for others' needs and let someone else know the details if you can't help yourself
- Read your Bible daily – suggestions will be on the parish web site
- And pray. Please, pray.

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