

Mothering Sunday Reflection “Mothering” ([Exodus 2:1-10](#) and [John 19.25-27](#))

Tears are an integral part of today’s Mothering Sunday readings. The tears of a desperate mother, making one final, risky effort to enable her son to survive under a genocidal regime which meant that any male Hebrew baby was supposed to be killed by the midwives at birth; she abandons him in a basket in the river. We have a crying baby, and then the tears and cries of a mother as she looks at her dying son’s broken body on the cross, weeping both for him and for herself, who would be left disgraced and destitute by the death of her firstborn son in such a horrific manner.

Have you ever wondered why it’s difficult to ignore a baby’s crying, even when it’s not your child? Scientists have discovered that human brains are hard-wired to have a strong response to their cries; we instinctively want to go and meet their needs and stop their crying. Babies’ cries are painful to our ears in order to catch our attention. No wonder then, that Pharaoh’s daughter was drawn to the baby abandoned amongst the reeds in the River Nile in a basket.



These harrowing scenes in which mothers lose their children are not the complete picture. God’s plan is bigger than that. New kinds of family groups are created. In a glorious piece of subversion, Moses’ sister, Miriam, who has been watching from her hideout, is able to offer Pharaoh’s daughter the services of Moses’ own mother, Jochebed, to act as wet-

nurse to the child, for which Jochebed is well paid. For all his attempts to destroy the male Hebrew children, Pharaoh is ultimately powerless – and it is the women in this story who are powerful. This adopted Hebrew boy goes on to be brought up as part of the Egyptian royal household.

As we mature, we may learn ways to both hide our tears and ignore those of others, but the scene from John’s gospel portrays a group of women who are distraught at the foot of the cross and will not abandon Jesus. Even in his agony, Jesus recognises and acts upon their distress.

Jesus ensures that his mother is not left abandoned. At the foot of the cross, he brings together Mary and the Beloved Disciple: the cross is the place where a new order is created. There is a beautiful kind of interrelationship between them, where she will care for him, and he will care for her. Jesus gives them a new identity as

mother and son, and a transformed home where both have a place at the table. In the midst of his pain and suffering, Jesus gathers together what might otherwise be lost and broken forever.

God's longing is always to gather people. When Jesus lamented over Jerusalem and its people, he said, "how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings." (Luke 13:34) It is a beautiful image of a loving mother, whose only desire is to protect her young. The loving message of being welcomed under that stretching, protective wing is also extended to us, regardless of gender, social status, culture or our physical or mental capacities. Our church should be a place which models this mothering role.

This Mothering Sunday may well be a painful time, as well as a time of joy and thanksgiving. As yet, we can't gather together to both give thanks and to grieve. Nevertheless, we can be comforted and rejoice in the fact that we are all supremely loved, and we all have a part in God's family. Whatever our experience of mothering in our lives is or has been, we can be assured that our Father God also mothers us.

The Collect for Mothering Sunday

God of compassion,
whose Son Jesus Christ, the child of Mary,
shared the life of a home in Nazareth,
and on the cross, drew the whole human family to himself:
strengthen us in our daily living
that in joy and in sorrow
we may know the power of your presence to bind together and to heal;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.

Amen.

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