

1 Cor 13:1-8a
Luke 2:41-50

Mothering Sunday 10.3.2024.

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We may say Happy Mother's Day to each other but I'm mindful of the fact that Mothering Sunday isn't a happy day for everyone. It may be a day of celebration and gratitude but it can also be a day filled with loss and painful memories. May I apologise now to anyone who might find anything I say difficult.

Our Corinthians reading, the biblical description of love, gives us the backdrop for everything I want to say today. Just a quick glance shows us that love is a big ask. It's really challenging. To keep no record of wrongs, not to be self seeking, to always trust, always hope. I know I fail at this every day. You see, the thing is, love always costs.

Every time our grandchildren come to stay I'm reminded of how exhausting motherhood is, a combination of sheer hard work and worry interspersed, hopefully, with love, joy and laughter. Well at least that was my experience. Nevertheless it is a privilege.

The churchy phrase "self giving love" describes the type of love motherhood requires. Putting the needs of another before yourself. It describes God's love at the centre of the Trinity. Father, Son and Holy Spirit pouring themselves out for the sake of the other. It's the way we are all called to live but it's very hard. It's contrary to our human nature. I'd like to suggest to you that parenting and family life provide daily opportunities for us to practice this unselfish way of loving. But we regularly get it wrong which is why I'm so grateful that the first characteristic of love, in our reading, is patience. God is endlessly patient with us! We need to be patient with one another.

Today I'd like us to think about 2 stories involving mothers and children. Can you picture this scenario? A family are shopping on Guildford high street. It's Saturday morning, very busy. The mother pushes a baby in a push chair and a 4 year old is behind meant to be holding her fathers hand. Going through big swing doors into a shop and the next thing the mother realises is that the 4 year old is nowhere to be seen. How might you react? What might you be feeling if you found yourself in this situation? Fear, maybe even panic? Your child is missing, just lost or no could she have been abducted? Would you go into problem solving mode? She can't have gone far! Let's ask the shop to announce it on their loud speaker. Are you cross, with the child? Angry with yourself or your husband?

I won't keep you in suspense. I was the 4 year old child. I found myself alone on the crowded pavement. Before long a kindly lady asked me if I was lost, took me to a policeman, who called for a police car, to take me to the police station. Sometime later I was, sitting next to a young officer drawing, when my mother rushed in. How I got over the sergeant's counter I have no idea but it felt as if I flew into my mother's arms and the look of delight and relief on her face I will never forget.

Now let's turn to our Gospel reading. Another story of concerned parents. As the party left Jerusalem, having attended the Passover festival, Mary, looking after the younger children, would have assumed Jesus was with Joseph and visa versa. At the end of the first day's travelling they gather together to rest and eat, they realise Jesus is missing. Imagine their feelings as they rush back to Jerusalem. Jesus our son is lost, the relief when they find him, but also the shock. Our child in discussion with the teachers of the law. The emotion behind Mary's words "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." I love it that the Bible includes sentences like this. It's evidence that the bible is about real people, living real human

lives with all the ups and downs and mixed motives. Not everything went smoothly even in Jesus' family life.

Can we see any connection between these 2 stories? We have 2 lost children and worried parents. Although I believe in both these incidents no one was deliberately intending to hurt another, painful feelings might have been the consequence.

We can hurt each other very easily. Events like this can trigger deep feelings. One of our deepest fears is the fear of abandonment. This could have been triggered in me, my mother and in Mary and Joseph. I have no memory of what I said to my mother that day but Jesus tells his earthly parents "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house". Mary and Joseph could have found this hurtful. It is as if Jesus is saying "Trust me, please understand, the temple was the place I needed to be, so I was able to speak about my Heavenly Father".

Trust- trust is so important in our family relationships.

Our Corinthians reading says "love always trusts". It's in trusting that others care for us that our fear of abandonment is eased. Trust is hard to gain and easily broken. Broken trust hurts. Because we hurt each other forgiveness is so necessary in family life. It's when we let the hurt fester that trouble begins. We need to forgive each other over and over again. So that trust can be restored.

Trusting in our unchanging, loving Heavenly Father is where our true security lies.

Trust is always a 2 way thing. There is our trust in God but there is also His trust in us. Women can feel undervalued, suffer from low self esteem. Feel that motherhood isn't sufficiently recognised by society for the vital role it is.

I want to end by telling you just how very much women are valued and trusted by God. We will shortly celebrate holy communion where we will be fed by Jesus. At the last supper Jesus broke the bread and said "This is my body, given for you"

Years before Jesus needed to be fed by a mother. He needed a mother to say "This is my body, given for you". That's how important motherhood is in God's eyes.

It's all about love. And there is always more of God's love to be entered into.

Amen