

Sermon for Sunday 14 March 2021 – Mothering Sunday

Readings Exodus 2: 1-10 John 19: 25-27

Good morning. I hope that you are enjoying Mothering Sunday so far. While today can be a very hard day for some people, it is good that we are able to remember our mums and also remember those who have acted as mothers to us in some way. Mothering Sunday gives us an opportunity to thank God for them, to pray for them, and to thank God and pray for all who are in our church family too.

I am so thankful to God for my own Mum and Dad and for the many people who have acted as mothers to me and encouraged me in my Christian life. My parents helped me to be part of the church family right from the beginning. Here is a picture of All Saints' Church Lockinge where I was baptized and where I first heard about God's love in Jesus. Later we moved to Chilton and we became part of the church family here. I've been blessed with attentive Godparents and learned from the people who led us in Sunday School, Pathfinders, Girls' Brigade, and those who continue to encourage me now.

In my early Sunday School days we were awarded stamps for attendance. They were large stamps depicting Bible stories and we were able to collect them and stick them in an album. They looked a bit like this picture here which shows the baby Moses in his basket being found by Pharaoh's daughter.

The first of this morning's readings, from Exodus chapter 2, told us the beginning of the story of Moses and of his mother.

In the reading the mother isn't named but later in Exodus we find out that her name was Jochabed. She and her husband were Hebrews and were from the priestly tribe of Levi who were responsible for leading the Hebrews in their worship of God. They would also have been eager to raise their children to love and worship God.

Jochabed already had at least two other children – Miriam and Aaron.

The Hebrew people had lived in Egypt for centuries, welcomed into the country in the time of their ancestor, Joseph. Joseph had been a wise leader and trusted by the then Pharaoh, even though he was a foreigner. The Hebrews lived very happily under the rule of the Hyksos dynasty who, like the Hebrews, were Semitic people. But when that dynasty died out the new Pharaohs were Egyptian and they hated and felt threatened by the Hebrews living in their country. They put them to work as slaves building cities to store food and treated them cruelly and without mercy.

One Pharaoh felt so threatened by the growth of numbers amongst the Hebrew people that he ordered that male babies should be killed at birth so that eventually the Hebrews would die out. But the Hebrew midwives refused to obey his decree and allowed the boys to live. Pharaoh ordered that baby boys should not be allowed to survive and that they should be thrown into the River Nile.

This is where we join the story today. Jochabed had given birth to a son and, rather than have him snatched away from her, she managed to hide him for 3 months – imagine now difficult it must have been to keep a baby hidden and trying not to let his cries be heard. When she could hide him no longer, Jochabed made a basket, covered it with tar so that it would float, laid the baby in the basket and placed it on the Nile amongst some reeds in the hope that he would be found by a kind person who would look after him. Jochabed asked her daughter Miriam to keep watch over the baby in the meantime.

He was safe there until Pharaoh's daughter came along to wash in the river and she saw the basket. She asked her servants to retrieve the basket and discovered that it contained a baby boy who she recognised as being a Hebrew. It seems she didn't share her father's cruel streak as she took pity on the baby.

Quick-thinking Miriam ran out and offered to find someone to care for the baby until he was a bit older. Pharaoh's daughter agreed and Miriam took her brother home to their own mother so that she could feed and care for him.

But eventually came the painful day when Jochabed had to give up her son for adoption by Pharaoh's daughter. I suspect that this was the hardest thing she had ever done – giving up her beloved son to someone else – but it was the best thing for her baby. He was handed over to Pharaoh's daughter who named him Moses which, like lots of names, had a meaning. It meant that she had drawn him out of the water. It was a very appropriate name because Moses would much later in his life be called by God to draw the Hebrew people out of Egypt, and lead them across the Red Sea to the special land that God had promised to his people.

Moses would become a great leader of the Hebrew people – even though he was scared and very reluctant to do such a demanding and dangerous job. I'm sure his mother and father continued to pray for Moses. His brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam, were with Moses as they crossed over the Red Sea together on their journey to the Promised Land and to the future that God had in store for them. You can read much more about the story of Moses in the book of Exodus.

Our second short reading came from John's gospel and told how Jesus died on the cross. At the foot of the cross were a group of women including Jesus' mother, Mary, and one disciple, John.

What a terrifying and awful sight for Mary to witness - her precious son being executed in such a cruel, painful and public way. She must have realised by now that this was the fulfilment of Simeon's prophecy when she and Joseph had taken the infant Jesus to the temple to dedicate him to God. Simeon had welcomed the new baby, realising that he was the anointed one whom God had sent to rescue his people. He warned Mary that a sword would pierce her own soul too, meaning that the cost of being the mother of Jesus would bring great pain and anguish as well as joy and hope.

The love that Mary and her companions had for Jesus kept them fixed to the spot at the foot of the cross while so many of Jesus' close friends ran away. They were devoted to supporting and praying for Jesus.

As Jesus hung on the cross he forgave those who were killing him and those who were jeering at him. He looked down and saw his mother and her companions and felt their pain too. He asked John to take Mary home, adopting her as a mother, and he asked Mary to adopt John as her son. They did just this, and adopted, loved and cared for each other.

We can only imagine the weight of sorrow in the hearts of Mary and John as they made their way from Golgotha where Jesus died to go to John's home.

Three days later they would hear the wonderful, almost unbelievable, news that Jesus had risen from the dead. He wouldn't continue to be with them on earth but would go to be with his heavenly Father in heaven.

These two biblical accounts give us wonderful examples of mothers who were devoted in their love and care for their children and who

prayed for and supported their children, bringing them up to know the love of God.

I think they give us some great role models in the way we can raise and nurture our children. We could follow their example and pray with our children and help them to learn from the Bible even in their very formative years. Perhaps we could pray for wisdom and discernment in choosing the right Godparents for our children so that they receive good Christian guidance in their lives.

Even if we don't have children or grandchildren ourselves, we can be part of the raising and nurturing of children in our villages and churches. We can all pray for and support the work amongst children and families. Perhaps there is a family you could 'adopt' and pray for them.

Maybe there are people in our villages who are lonely who we could 'adopt' and care for. Could you come alongside someone of any age and help them to know that they are loved and valued by God and by his church here?

As we are gradually released from the Covid 19 restrictions I am sure that there will be opportunities for us to meet together as the church family and to encourage each other, pray with and for each other, and celebrate together that we are part of God's worldwide family which rejoices in his love and the resurrection hope that we share.

Prayer. Dear Lord, thank you for our mothers and for all who have nurtured us and those who continue to do so. Please help us to lift our eyes to see where you would have us serve you so that we can care for one another with the love of Jesus in our hearts. Amen.