

Exodus 2: 1 – 10; John 19: 25 - 27

In the readings we've had today we've had two mothers. One is Mary the mother of Jesus, and the other is Jochebed, the mother of Moses.

Mothering Sunday is often a day when we rightly think of our mothers ... think of all they have done for us, providing for us, looking after us, the concern they had for us growing up.

But I also recognise that there is sometimes pain when talking about mothers, some who had bad relationships with their own mother, or some who through circumstance long to be mothers and yet are unfulfilled.

I want to say from the outset that Mothering Sunday isn't just a celebration of 'mothers' but is also about God. It's about looking at God's 'parenting' of us, his concern for us, as a parent has concern for their child. But Mothering Sunday traditionally was also about going back to the church you were baptised in – the Mother Church – to remember and recall God's faithfulness to you ...

And so let's take a quick tour of 'Mothers in the Bible' and see what we can take from each one and what more we can discover together about God today.

There are in fact lots of mothers in the Bible, many of whom aren't named or well known – but each shows us something of the characteristics of mothers:

Sarah the mother who waited – **Genesis 11 – 21**

Hagar – the mother who endured rifts etc – **Genesis 21**

Rebekah – the mother who believed – her older child was to serve the younger – **Genesis 25, then 27**

Leah and Rachel – sharing? 12 tribes of Israel – **Genesis 29**

Jochebed – the mother who planned – **Exodus 2**

Samson's mother – the mother who followed God's rules? – **Judges 13**

Naomi – the mother-in-law who shared her faith – **Ruth 1-4**

Hannah – the mother who kept her promise – **1 Samuel 1 - 3**

Elizabeth - the mother who believed in miracles – **Luke 1**

Mary – blessed among women – Jesus' mother – **Luke 1**

All of these characteristics could be said to be good, and demonstrate what makes a good mother. But none of them are perfect. I'm sure that whilst I think I'm a good parent I'm not always. I make mistakes and I need the forgiveness and love of God, I need grace and God's Spirit to keep guiding me and equipping me as I raise my children.

However each of these show us a characteristic of God. Let's look at them again:

Patience, Endurance, Faith, Sharing planning, Equipping, Converting or Evangelising, Keeping promises, Performing miracles, and Blessing.

All of these we could I think, without too much difficulty, fit into God's character.

A God who is patient with us when we make mistakes ...

A God who endures, who keeps going, who is constantly working ...

A God who shares, who provides, who equips ...

A God who has the perfect plan ...

A God who loves to see people come to faith, to return to him ...

Who always keeps his promises, works miracles and also is blessed and blesses us ...

A God who is faithful, and has been faithful and will be faithful ...

The story of Jochebed, the mother of Moses, on the one hand shows the planning of the mother, but doesn't it also show the planning of God – the Pharaoh's daughter 'happened to come' to that place?

How often do we settle for a sort of coincidental universe where things just seem to 'happen' – God led circumstances together to create a way for the nation of Israel to be freed from captivity – I don't think we can just write this off as one of life's coincidences!

I want to highlight that God does know, and God does have a plan – even when faced with the killing of Hebrew children. Each of the characters in this story of Moses from the mother, the sister and to the Pharaoh's daughter came together.

I'm not launching off into a theological debate here – that of 'free will' or 'pre-determination' – but just wanting to highlight that even in moments that seem impossible or 'bound to happen' doesn't mean God can't be at work to bring something about that we didn't expect. He may or may not intervene – **Romans 11:34** says: *'who can know the mind of the LORD?'* Don't mishear me and think that therefore we do nothing – but like Jochebed, faithful wife of a Levite priest, we pray, we seek God, we discern his will, we plan, we follow his leading – and he works in wonderful ways!

Secondly, on the cross Jesus addresses his mother, and his disciple. Here Mary is in torment – can you imagine what it must have felt like to watch your son, the one who you knew wasn't just any ordinary child, but was from God, being killed in such a brutal way? On the cross, in that moment of pain and suffering Jesus has nothing to give to his mother, no land, no money, no estate or servants to help her. But he does have valued and trusted friends ... ones who he knows will care for his mother. So he gives her what he can, and so provides for her for the rest of her life we are told.

But the example of this disciple (John), choosing to care for a mother who has lost her son, also gives us an example of how we can care for others as surely as this disciple, although knowing who this was, wouldn't have meant he had known her particularly well – I'm just speculating here! John might have had his own mother to look after too. But he commits to caring for her, to looking after her and to providing for her. In some ways 'parenting' her, as I'm sure many of you will have experiences where the role is reversed and the parent, who used to care for us, we now care for. And there can be real joy in those moments, and it can be a really precious time. But would you be willing to do that for someone you don't know?

There are many great Carers who do just that, working tirelessly in Care homes and Hospitals or even in homes caring for people who need help – people who would otherwise be strangers.

That caring for the stranger – that concern for the other – is something that we can all choose to show.

Ultimately in doing so, in showing love for one another, and for the stranger – we are following the example of parents, of Jesus and of God – who loves and cares for each of us as a mother or a parent cares for their own child.

So as we reflect on these different characteristics of God as a parent, I want to encourage us to think about three things:

(see next page)

1. Has there been someone in your life who has demonstrated these Godly characteristics? It could be a mother, or grandmother or friend, it could even be a father or a brother. Take a moment to think about these people and thank God for placing these people into your lives.

2. Where can you show these characteristics in your own life? Are there people you know of who need grace, love, blessings or even patience or faith?

3. Can you think of moments in your life where you have seen God displaying these characteristics? Sometimes these can be hard to think of because when things are difficult, and the last year certainly has been, it's hard to see where God has been at work ... but be assured that he has been there. And like a mother, he has cared for us, carried us, embraced us and loved us, no matter what.

We may not think we're deserving of this. You've probably sent someone a gift for today, Mothering Sunday ... the amazing thing is that **God has sent us a gift, today and every day. His Grace** ... we are not deserving of all these wonderful characteristics, but He gives them to us anyway, despite how we feel about ourselves

And like a mother his love is unconditional.