

Loving, Nurturing, Caring

The sermon given at the All-Age Holy Communion Service on 31st March 2019 by the Youth and Children's Minister, Mr Ben Merrel, in Beverley Minster.

Exodus 2:1-10; John 19:25-26

So as Jonathan said earlier today, Mothering Sunday is traditionally a day when we buy flowers and chocolates for our mums, take them out for lovely meals and generally spoil them rotten, just as they do for us the other 364 days of the year. Hands up if you have booked a nice table somewhere for a meal - excellent. So it's right that we celebrate all mums out there, because as well as the joys and privileges of bringing up children, it can be a bit hard sometimes. I know that in our household we have the twin joys of toddler tantrums and a baby who doesn't quite get the difference between day and night yet - hopefully it'll get easier (please?!). So on this day of celebration, I promise I won't make you put your hand up again in case your key reason of coming is for the flowers at the front to give to your mum. What I want to do is open up the definition of today's celebration a bit. So as well as our mothers and all mums out there, I want us to think about who is it that nurtures us, and also to think about who are the people that we nurture.

Have a little think about the saying, "It takes a village to raise a child." Who were the people in your village who helped bring you up? I guess for a lot of us our mum would be the first person on that list. But who else had a key role in helping shape us to be the people we are today. Have a little think about the characters and personalities who helped to mould you into who you are; who inspired you; picked you up when you fell; taught you key life skills; gave you a love or a passion; just loved you for who you are with everything they have. Maybe you can't remember them all - I sure can't remember all of the people who were a part of my life when I was, say, Isla's age, but I know how much she is affected by the people around her now, as a nearly four year old. Just this weekend she was really excited to see her Uncle Pete and Amy who came to stay. Whenever she sees Robert, she tells me all about that time he came to nursery to play

music and sing songs with her and her friends. And of course she misses her Isabel Bruning, her friend who moved back to Australia earlier this year - and often she asks if we can speak on the computer or write a card. So there's a quick insight into some of the people that Isla identifies as either having a nurturing role in her life and also someone she misses who she doesn't get to 'mother' anymore in the way that only 3 year olds can.

So have a little think, not just about those people who help us to develop, but who we nurture in our lives. Who are the people who will benefit when we live as a good example through our words and actions? Who do we actively build up, support and encourage? Who do we love, love, love, and would do anything for? Because I believe we all have a key role in nurturing the people around us; a calling to be part of a community that nurtures, that mothers, those around us; a calling that God demonstrates again and again and again in the Bible through his actions with his people, and through the actions of individuals.

Let us start with our old testament reading, Moses in the rushes. (We've all heard it once or twice before, yeah?) Who are the nurturing examples in the story?

- How about Moses Mum? I know packing him away in the basket doesn't seem like a really great nurturing move, but she did that to keep him away from the Egyptian soldiers, who would have killed him for being an Israelite boy.
- How about Pharaoh's daughter? She took pity on a helpless baby boy who couldn't help being born the nationality he was or being born there at that time as an outsider. She saw someone who she could help and so she did.
- How about Moses sister? She must surely have seen the heartache and stress her mum would have gone through putting her baby boy in that basket in the rushes in such a precarious situation. And when she saw an opportunity to give her mum the chance to raise and nurture and Moses herself, the sister was in effect nurturing her mum.
- And how about God? Where's God in this situation?

In the Lion Storyteller Bible which I use for assemblies and messy church, Bob Hartman retells this story with God gently nudging people: Moses' mum to take a risk; Pharaoh's daughter to take pity; and the biggest nudge of all, Moses' sister to leap from her vantage point and suggest something that sets in motion the plan that God has to get his people free from Egypt.

I think this story is the start of a great narrative arc of how God cares for his people over the next several decades, mothering them through plagues, wandering in the wilderness and eventually the promised land - but that might be a little bit much for today's service - so instead, how about we think about that reading from John?

Here we have Jesus looking down from the cross at the woman who brought him up, whose entire life was turned upside down all those years ago when she found out she'd been raising God's son, who when presenting Jesus as a baby in the temple was told his life would bring heartache to her and countless others - and yet she still mothered him nurtured him and loved him with all she had. And now, at the point of her most unimaginable pain and anguish, Jesus looks down on his mum and thinks, "Who's gonna look after her?" Then he looks and sees his friend, his closest most trustworthy mate: "Mum here's someone to look after you. John here's someone to mother you." Even at that point of agony, Jesus saw a way to help two people he loved, and, in this Gospel, this is pretty much his last act before he dies. It's so difficult to imagine that at our lowest, hardest points, God is still pointing us towards loving, nurturing, caring for others. And that's the challenge set from the example that Jesus gives us.

So what should Mothering Sunday mean to us today, whether we're lucky enough to be mothers or not? Well, we are God's hands and feet here on earth: all of us here make up God's church; it's not the stone and the wood of this wonderful or inspiring minster, lovely as it is, it's the flesh and blood and love of the individuals here.

And as his church, strengthened by his Holy Spirit, we can all do our bit to 'mother' those around us: maybe there's someone we've lost contact with - perhaps send a letter, make a phone call, even a tweet or a video message; maybe that contact has been lost because you've grown apart, or there's a broken relationship to heal - could

you make that first step towards reconciliation (it's easy to forget others, with all the busyness of life); maybe there's a face missing from your part of church or life you haven't really noticed missing - take this as a cue to search them out and see how they're doing; is there a neighbour who would welcome a visit or being taken out for coffee; and you may be in a position where you have surplus and can donate some food to the food bank for those who have to go without, to feed their own children.

So whether we have children or not, let us make this Mothering Sunday a time of renewing our mothering skills, when we can try to emulate the mothering love of God and go out to reflect it in our community. Let's make this Mothering Sunday be the start of our mothering of all of those we come in contact with. Our mothering may be but a pale reflection of God's love for his world, but we can all do our best. And if just one life is made better because of today, then for that, thanks be to God.