

The mother of Moses gives up her child... ... Twice!!

A sermon given on the on the Fourth Sunday of Lent, 14th March 2021, by the Associate Vicar, the Revd Wendy Wale, in the Attended Communion Service.

Exodus 2: 1-10; John 19:25b-27

In the name of God, who mothers us all with His love, Amen.

So as we approach the year anniversary since the start of the first lockdown, and the pandemic that has altered all of our lives forever and caused so much separation and loss, this Mothering Sunday, I offer a simple reflection on the story of Moses, holding space. I hope, for us all to bring our hearts and minds before God who is mother to us all.

'Now, a man from the house of Levi went and married Levite woman, the woman conceived and bore a son.'

One of the greatest privileges in the past few months here at Beverley Minster has been hosting some small in-person support groups for first-time mothers and their newborn babies. We began our sixth group last week and we met a baby that was just two weeks old. We've heard story after story from these wonderful mothers that have made us cry with joy at the miracle of new life and at the shared agony in the challenges of giving birth during a pandemic, not being surrounded by the support of family, friends and groups to help. For some of the babies, the group was the first time they'd ever seen another child and the joy of watching their delight on their faces as they gazed around the room and saw another like them will stay with me forever. Becoming a mother is always hard and lonely and messy. I had no idea how messy till I heard these stories, and at times terrifying. But the utter love, loyalty and devotion to the child that has formed in a mother's womb is indescribable.

New mothers; mothers of many; mothers who have struggled to conceive or give birth; mothers with post-natal depression; mothers who parent alone; mothers who have borne the burden of home schooling; mothers who don't feel they are enough; mothers who have children with complex needs or serious health concerns; for fathers who find themselves in the mothering role - ***May, you know the nurturing love of God who mothers us all.***

[Wendy takes a 'prayer' daffodil from the basket in front of her, symbolic of Moses' basket, and replaces it, proud of the rim, to symbolise her prayer for mothers and fathers]

'And when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him for three months when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and plastered it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it amongst the reeds on the bank of a river.'

There are many reasons why a mother may have to give up her precious child: mental, physical or emotional desperation; or the breakdown of a relationship.

As we think of this yet nameless baby being placed in a basket and set onto the water in order to save his life, we take a moment to recognise today that there are over 30 million refugee children in our world. Children whose parents have had to take drastic decisions to protect their lives, some of whom still end up being placed in precarious boats and set on the water. ***May each child separated from their parents, family, home or country, know the protecting love of God who mothers us all.***

[Wendy takes another 'prayer' daffodil from the basket in front of her and replaces it proud of the rim to symbolise her prayer]

'His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.'

The well-known African proverb declares it takes a village to raise a child and of course, is profoundly true. And we recognise all those who, like the sister of Moses, watch and protect children who are not their own: grandparents; godparents; aunts and uncles; teachers and nursery workers; social workers and medical specialists; ***May you know the strength of God's love, who mothers us all.***

[Wendy takes another 'prayer' daffodil from the basket in front of her and replaces it proud of the rim to symbolise her prayer]

'The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket amongst the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying and she took pity on him.'

God used the daughter of Pharaoh's compassion in the most extraordinary way. Her instinct to care for an unknown child reunited him with his birth mother and raised up the man who would lead his people into freedom.

We continue to live in a world with complex and messy power structures where resources are not evenly distributed and many still live in fear for their children's futures. But we recognise today the hugely important role of foster parents, adoptive parents and step-parents, who bring children into their lives, and love and nurture them with every fibre of

their being, giving them new stories and fresh hope. **As God adopts us into his family, may all who parent through adoption in the widest sense, know the determination and courage of God's fierce love who mothers us all.**

[Wendy takes another 'prayer' daffodil from the basket in front of her and replaces it proud of the rim to symbolise her prayer]

'So the woman took the child and nursed it when the child grew up. She brought him to Pharaoh's daughter and she took him as her son. She named him Moses because she said, I drew him out of the water.'

Having been paid to nurse her own baby, the Levite woman had to give up her child a second time.

We recognise that today is a day of pain for many who have given up or lost their precious babies; those who have miscarried or whose child has died; those who were never able to have a child of their own; those who are no longer in relationship with their children - **May you know the comforting love of God who mothers us all.**

[Wendy takes another 'prayer' daffodil from the basket in front of her and replaces it proud of the rim to symbolise her prayer]

'So the girl went and called the child's mother.'

For many, we will be calling our mothers today, separated by the pandemic, unable to visit due to regulations, distance or shielding. For others, this is a day of precious memories of mothers who have died, who are no longer with us, who we long to call, to hug, to see again. May you know, the love of Jesus who asked his much-loved disciple to care for his mother at the cross. **May God who mothers are all, hide you in the shadow of his wings.**

[Wendy takes the final 'prayer' daffodil from the basket in front of her and replaces it proud of the rim to symbolise her prayer]

So as we offer our prayers and our situations to God who longs for us to know his motherly embrace, we recognise that like this basket, like the basket that protected and carried Moses to safety, this represents the whole church, the people who gather to share the one bread. We are the comforters and the comforted, each of our unique stories and joys and sorrows woven together as part of the story of God seeking to bring hope and light to our world.

Our basket is huge, there is room for so many more stories. We're all invited to share in that love.

Reading Text

Exodus 2: 1-10

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him for three months. When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him. The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. "This must be one of the Hebrews' children," she said. Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

John 19: 25b-27

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.