

Mothering Sunday ...

... Real Love lets go

A sermon given on the Fourth Sunday of Lent, Mothering Sunday, 19th March 2023 – by the Vicar, the Revd Canon Jonathan Baker, in Beverley Minster

John 19:25b-27

Real love lets go.

That's the theme of this Mothering Sunday. And it's a feature of all good parenting, isn't it? Knowing when and how to let go of your children. We hear quite a bit these days about 'helicopter' parents, those mothers and fathers who are so anxious about their children either to protect them or to secure the best for them, that they're forever hovering around them, doing everything for them, not letting them learn from their mistakes and not letting them discover that in actual fact, life cannot be lived without an element of risk. But real love lets go. My own children would probably say that I am not so much (or wasn't so much) a 'helicopter' parent as a 'peregrine falcon' parent, loftily indifferent, except for the occasional unwelcome intervention from on high. And that, perhaps owes much to my upbringing. When I was only a few months old my mother famously left me in my pram outside the greengrocers and forgot about me. According to family mythology, she didn't realise anything was wrong until she got home laden with tomatoes and broccoli, to be greeted by my dad with, "Where's the baby?" So when I say, "Real love lets go", there are perhaps age- appropriate limits.

But it's hard, isn't it? Perhaps especially for mothers, to know how we can set our children free in a world obsessed with eliminating every risk, and where we feel we have to find someone to blame whenever something goes wrong. And in a world where parents struggle with feeling guilty if everything isn't absolutely perfect for their kids. It's tempting for parents to wrap their children in cotton wool to keep them safe from harm. And if we're not careful, we end up making them prisoners, apparently for their own good. Because real love, lets go.

And today, of course, we're letting go of Wendy, Tom and Jonah. And that's not easy. I wanted to hang on to Wendy and keep her here - ['You don't want to venture out into the wider Church of England, Wendy, it's a nasty, rough place and you might get hurt.']. More honestly of course there's still plenty to do here. And part of me wants to say, "Stay and look after your old vicar. Who's going to be the prop in the twilight years of my ministry?" But actually, you need to go and we need to let go of you. The Lord will use you in new ways to everyone's benefit. And we here will in due course discover more of God's grace, even without you.

And in this morning's gospel reading, we see the pain of letting go. We see Mary's pain. She must have wondered where she went wrong as a mother - this son, so full of promise, upon whom all her hopes were projected along with those of many other people, dying a criminal's death in agony before her. Simeon had warned her that a sword would pierce her heart and she must have felt it a thousand times that day. She loved much, but in letting go of her son, she suffered much. And on the cross, we see Jesus's pain - not just the obvious physical pain, but the pain of letting go; of leaving his mother, who probably had relied on him in all kinds of ways; the pain of leaving the beloved disciple, who, like all the disciples, must have looked woefully unprepared to look after himself in the world; the pain of letting go of life when he was still so young. And on the cross, we see God's pain, the pain of the father letting go of his only begotten son out of love for the world, a letting go that was leading to a cosmic bereavement at the heart of all things the separation of the Son of God from his Father. And yet all these different kinds of letting go lead to resurrection. Without Mary's letting go, without Jesus's letting go, without God the Father letting go, there is no resurrection: there is no real freedom; no setting free from the powers of sin and death; no salvation; no forgiveness; no redemption or renewal; no grace; and ultimately, no hope. For real love to triumph, it has to let go.

And what we see in the gospel reading this morning is that out of all of this letting go, not only is there a new freedom, it's the freedom to offer faithful, committed love. As Jesus says from the cross to his mother, "*Woman, here is your son.*" And to the beloved disciple he says, "*Here is your mother*", as he entrusts them to each other. So the 'letting go' isn't the end.

From the foot of the cross, the place of ultimate letting go, there is a kind of commissioning, a sending out, a new beginning, as Jesus lets go of them in order that Mary can look after the disciple and he can look after her. And a new family can be born, the church family, based on freedom and forgiveness, generosity and hope, a family of grace. So the letting go isn't the end, it's only the beginning of something new, a kind of growing up into our true humanity.

So on this mothering Sunday, parents, don't be afraid to let go as your children get older. God loves them even more than you do, and He'll stick with them. And as a church let's not be afraid of letting go of Wendy and Tom and Jonah, because we're not just saying goodbye, we're commissioning her to serve those poor benighted people down south. And as we let go of her, we're allowing new life to break out, not only in Bar Hill, but also by God's grace here in Beverley. From the foot of the cross, new life begins as we set one another free to make new communities, new networks, new bonds of love:

"Woman here is your son. Son, here is your mother."

Reading Text

John 19:25b-27

²⁵ *And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.* ²⁶ *When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.'* ²⁷ *Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.*