

Mothering Sunday 2019

1 Samuel 1 20-28; Colossians 3 12-17; Luke 33-35

Hands up those who like Marmite? And those who don't?

I think Mothering Sunday can be a bit like Marmite – it divides opinion.

The church calls today Mothering Sunday, the secular world calls it Mother's Day. To my mind the 'Mother's Day' tag is rather limiting, because we're encouraged to honour just one person.

And there's nothing wrong with that of course, but the preference for 'Mothering Sunday' implies a far more inclusive and far reaching approach.

'Mothering' come from the verb 'to mother'; in a loving, caring, nurturing sense, it is something we Christians should all be doing.

There are several models of 'mother' that we might look at to help us with this demanding and complicated role.

A prime example is Mary mother of Jesus. In reality we know very little about her; she's mentioned by name less than 20 times in the Bible.

We can deduce though, that being the mother of God's Son was profoundly testing, and that Mary, like Hannah with her longed-for son Samuel, trustingly committed her Son into God's hands.

In the reading from St Luke's Gospel, we heard that when Mary presented her infant son in the Temple, she was warned that not only would Jesus be great, but that also a sword would pierce her soul.

Mothering is frequently painful, it demands sacrificial love and both Mary and Hannah show us that this is so.

For those of you visiting today, in this parish during Lent, we have been looking at various aspects Reconciliation for our sermon series; and today we are looking at reconciliation within families.

So, having touched a little on Mothering, let us now look at families.

What is a family?

One of the definitions I like best is simply 'a group of people', because it covers almost every conceivable scenario. With that definition we will all probably belong to numerous families or communities.

And we would I'm sure, like them all to be united, content, caring and nurturing groups, but unfortunately, we know that in all too many cases this is not so.

There are family units who have had to cope with such awful traumas that it's hard for the majority of us to comprehend.

Christians sometimes refer to the church as Mother Church, a hugely diverse group of people bound together not by a biological relationship, but by their faith in, and worship of, God.

At its very best, the Church will serve as an example of nurturing and loving service that is open to all; and we heard in St Paul's letter to the Colossians, some very good advice to help us.

And now onto reconciliation:

It is a hard subject for Mothering Sunday, and we must acknowledge that, for it is a fact that even the best of families will have, or have had, their disagreements and difficulties.

Being a Christian family, person, or community does not exempt us.

In fact, you could say that for Christians, conflict and disagreements are much worse, for we know, or at least have an idea of, how God wants us to live, and we can berate ourselves for falling short of this.

We know God desires reconciliation and forgiveness with those against whom we find ourselves at odds, and yet we find it so hard sometimes, especially when the problems are seemingly insurmountable or out of our control.

What can we do?

Fortunately, we have God's assurance that if we try, honestly try, to be reconciled to ourselves, to God and to others, he graciously forgives us our failings and shortcomings.

We have heard several times in this series, that reconciliation includes forgiveness and is not about forgetting. It is about the open and honest desire to overcome problems and to understand them properly from both sides, so that we can go forward in a new way that is acceptable to all.

And it applies just as much to the seemingly insignificant, frequent occurrences, as it does to the major ones.

Forgiveness brings life and restores relationships, and relationships are foundational to families and communities.

Unfortunately, it is all too easy to be busy, and avoid taking action, but without action nothing will change.

We are required in all humility to put self aside, and without being judgemental or compromising our integrity, to take action.

It saddens me when people say 'I shan't come to church on Mothering Sunday as it's too painful or has no relevance to me.'

We all had or have mothers; some of us were lucky in our relationships; some were not, and some have had no opportunity for any kind of relationship with their Mother at all.

And we do need to remember those who have never been mothers through choice or circumstance; those who found or who are finding, mothering difficult; those Fathers who are trying to inhabit the roles of both Father and Mother; and those who identify in Mary's suffering, when swords have pierced our souls.

But it is good to be reminded that we are all God's children. We have a shared parenthood by virtue of our common humanity.

And if we think more broadly, we will recognise that we can all be mothers, in the sense that we can take part in nurturing and caring for a great many people.

So, as we receive our posies today let us be grateful for the nurturing that we have received, and for Christian families to which we belong, who can help us in being reconciled to ourselves and to others.

Amen