

## **Mothering Sunday 2022**

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

Many mothers will do anything for their children. This is not to say that there will never be arguments, frustrations and cross words in a mother's relationship with her child; far from it. To admonish, correct and direct are all included in the role description. There is also risk involved in a parental relationship and here we see it very clearly. The letting-go of a child, which usually comes around the time of young adulthood, happens in this story when Moses is only a baby. In the news recently there has been discussion about the historic pressure for unmarried mothers to give up their babies for adoption, even as recently as the 1960's. Many of these women were severely traumatised by this barbaric policy.

The context is grim. Pharaoh has ordered the slaughter of all boys aged 2 and under, which is why Moses' mother keeps him hidden until it is no longer possible. She sees that he is a *fine child* – although every mother tends to think this of her infant. She is given the idea of floating Moses on the Nile in a basket, strategically placed for Pharaoh's daughter to discover him.

This is a calculated risk. All parenting is risky, but this is particularly so. Can you imagine putting a 3-month-old baby in a basket on a river? What if the basket tips up? What if the pitch rubs off and lets in water? What if he is attacked by animals or large birds? What if Pharaoh's daughter is not interested and hands him over to her father's henchmen? There are many mothers who have to make horribly difficult choices over their children – think of child refugees floating over the English Channel.

In this case, God seems to be at work. The baby is rescued. He is even given by to his mother to be nursed. The basket becomes the place where Egyptian meets Hebrew, suffering evokes pity, pity leads to care, and care brings lasting interchange between the Egyptian and Hebrew communities, focused on a single person (Moses) but with effects that will change them both irrevocably.

Here is faith and risk in equal measure, as well as compassion, openness and trust in God and others. Alongside the role of his birth mother, Moses is cared for by his quick-thinking vigilant sister and was probably delivered by the fearless Hebrew midwives – Shiprah and Puah – who flagrantly disobeyed Pharaoh’s orders to kill the boys. Pharaoh’s daughter takes no less risk in her impulsive, yet compassionate, adoption of this child.

Our lives are wrapped around with people who look out for us, some of whom we remember and thank, and some of whom we don’t. We all have a nurturing role to play in the lives of others.

Moses is raised in Pharaoh’s court and, we have reason to believe, becomes an entitled brat, someone without self-control who feels able to murder an Egyptian task master. Later on, this is why Moses enters the wilderness of Midian to work as an obscure shepherd in a place where no-one goes. Here, he is not only safe from extradition but learns to eat humble pie. Like so many of the biblical characters with the call of God on their lives, Moses’ character is shaped under these harsh conditions to fit him for the role God has prepared for him.

In the story of Moses, his mother, sister, and Pharaoh's daughter fade from view swiftly. The quiet subtext is – our children are independent beings with their own missions, thoughts, desires, wants and needs. We do not own them but rather have them on loan for a while, doing our best for them while they are with us. The role of the mother, or any carer, is to create the safe freedom for a child to grow and develop into themselves, equipping them for the world, nurturing skills and abilities, and releasing them to create families of their own.

Jesus was obviously loved and cared for by his mother. Episodes in the Gospels tell us of his parent's search for Jesus on the return trip from Jerusalem, finding him in the Temple. They recount the search for Jesus by his mother and siblings when they feared he had lost his mind. And now, in searing pain on the cross, Jesus' mother looks on and her crippled heart bleeds. Imagine the horror of seeing your child put to death in such a grotesque and public manner. Yet, this is the time when the roles reverse. Jesus' last act of earthly kindness to his mother was to put her in a family with the disciple whom he loved. A woman without male protection was prey to all kinds of abuse and difficulty.

Perhaps not in every case, but in many, there comes a time when the roles reverse and the child becomes the one to provide the safe freedom of the parent to reach the end of their days in peace and security.

Today we remember and give thanks for all those who have sheltered us, helped us, cared for us – sometimes our mothers, sometimes other people. Maybe today reminds us of our need to respond to a cry for help or call on our compassion? And beyond the earthly caring there is another hand at work, the loving compassion and direction of almighty God. Can we look back on times

when we have been carefully placed out of harm's reach, or pulled from the waters, or taught and provided for, or told off and sent to eat humble pie, or banished into the wilderness to have our character refined? Well, if you can look back and see these things, thank God for his goodness and steadfast care. With God, we are always children, whether we are 6 or 96, and nothing we can do will drive his love away from us.

**Amen.**

Let's Pray

Loving God,

Thank you for our mothers and those who care for us; thank you for the joys of parenthood. Assure us in times of anxiety. Help those who are facing troubles in relationships. We ask for a right sense of boundary and freedom among those we care for. May growth and maturity go hand in hand with aspiration and risk. May we trust our loved ones to you, Lord, as we step forward in faith and face the future together. **Amen.**