

Mothering Sunday

I stand here in need of God's mercy and grace. May I speak in the name of the God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Here is your son. Here is your mother.

One of the final things Jesus does before he dies painfully on the cross is to create family. To invite his mother and one of his closest friends to become family to one another, to nurture and care for one another. Jesus is dying and knowing the pain and loss his mother and friend are about to face, he invites them to become a new kind of family to one another. This new family does not take away the pain and loss, but it creates something new and hopeful in the presence and for the future.

Families can be complicated; we can see the worst and best of one another within families. Some of us might carry deep pain that has been caused by family. Family ought to be a place of safety and flourishing, but it is not always so. Yet what Jesus invites is mother and friend into, I believe is a relationship of care and nurture. And John's immediate decision to take Mary, like he would with his mother, into his house speaks of exactly such a relationship of care and nurture. John would make sure Mary had family she knew she belonged with, an adopted son who would care for her. And John would have a second mother, a person caring for him and nurturing him, in ways she might have cared for her firstborn son otherwise.

Mothering Sunday can carry a variety of emotions and expectations with it. It is a Sunday to celebrate the loving care and nurture of mothers, but it often also carries painful echoes. Of strained or destructive relationships, of unfulfilled longings and of loss. The receiving of loving nurture and the giving of loving nurture can be one of the greatest joys and strengths in our lives, but their absence can be an equally great source of pain.

I do not know all the particular stories of mothering we all hold in our hearts this morning. I am sure some of them are cherished stories, but other stories might be mixed in there, that are more painful. No matter what mothering stories are at the forefront of our minds today, our gospel reading this morning invites us to consider a life-giving expansion of our understanding of mothering nurture and care, of family.

Loving nurture and care are at the core of how God relates to all of creation, to each and everyone of us. The God revealed to us through Jesus Christ is a God of love and care. A God who nurtures by feeding the hungry and by teaching all who will listen about who God truly is and what God's will means for us. A God who cares by healing the sick, embracing the untouchable and eating with the outcasts. A God who loves unconditionally and without limits to the point of death on a cross. A God whose love is stronger than death, as shown in the resurrection of Christ on Easter morning. The mothering, nurturing and caring love of God is for us all, every day of our lives, no matter what experiences of family and mothering we have, God's arms are always open and ready to welcome us, love us and nurture us.

As Jesus invites Mary and John to become family to one another, Jesus invites them to inhabit the concept of God's family. God's family is a family that goes beyond blood relations, one that we are baptised into in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is a family that can grow endlessly, a family invited to care and nurture one another across different generations, cultures, genders and backgrounds.

How might we go about this? It could be as simple as asking someone how they are doing, being prepared to really listen. Going round to someone who is feeling poorly, letting them know they are not forgotten. Sending a card or a drawing to someone, just because. It could be having someone over for a meal or bringing a home cooked meal to someone who might just be a bit overwhelmed with life and work at the moment. Helping someone with fixing a broken cupboard or car. Offering someone a spare room while they are getting back on their feet after life has thrown them a curveball. Or simply faithfully praying for someone we know is struggling at the moment. There are many different ways we can care and nurture each other. Many different ways in which we can become an extended family to one another. And I know, that many of you are already doing exactly these kinds of things for each other.

Mothering, nurture and care come in many different shapes and sizes. Some give birth to their children, some adopt their children, some foster their children. Some simply mother anyone who God puts in their path, nurturing and caring, however God leads them to. Who are the people both women and men, in your life, who have mothered you, nurtured

and cared for you? For whose nurture and care do you want to give thanks today? And who are the people, of any and all ages, that God might be calling you to mother, to nurture and care for at this point in your life?

Here is your son. Here is a mother.

Amen.