



Dear Friends,

Mothering Sunday aka Mothers Day

If, like me, you have come to faith and church later in life and you have made the mistake of referring to Sunday week as Mothers Day, it might have been pointed out to you in no uncertain terms that it is actually Mothering Sunday, not the 'Johnny come lately' largely American invention of Mothers Day.

They will tell you that Mothering Sunday has much older, deeper and liturgically significant meaning than merely the appreciation of the person who gave you birth.

I have always struggled a little to preach on Mothering Sunday [or Mothers Day for that matter] because I am one of those who has never known my Mother. She left my brother and me when I was a baby. So by and large the day has passed me by apart from ensuring that my children remembered to acknowledge their Mother suitably - having given them the money to so do!

I know there are many other reasons to be careful about eulogising too fully about motherhood as it is not given to all nor is everyone's experience the same.

But for me it came as something of a relief to find out that it is ok to spend time in the sermon talking more about it traditionally being a day when people visited; the church of their baptism - their 'mother' church, or their cathedral along with, rightly, honouring Mothers.

When I think about it though, many people and strangely institutions have 'mothered' me over the years. These include relatives, friends, organisations such as the Royal Navy, Coastguard and yes the church.

How can this be I hear you wondering? Surely none of these can equal a mother's love and nurturing.

Well, at its best, of course you are right; but there is much to mothering that is not necessarily the sole preserve of women. Those institutions that took care of me nurtured after a fashion, looked to my needs, again after a fashion and kept me safe. Though there was not much love in evidence.

I look upon God's creator love - supremely evidenced in Jesus Christ - as both maternal and paternal. Having breathed life into us, He nurtures, gives love - often unrequited, guides, rebukes, is ever present and will never deny us.

Jesus characterised that love in everything he did and does. In the Luke reading [2:33 to 35] we find Jesus as a babe in arms encountering Simeon and Anna in the Temple.

It's easy for us to picture this in one sense because most of us will have been to a baptism. We will have heard the usual words expressing a deep sense of joy and love as the babe is presented to the vicar in order for the great liturgy of baptism to be performed. Following this, photos are taken, kind remarks made and presents given. A joyous day for family and friends.

Not quite the same experience for Mary and Joseph. We are told they were amazed at what Simeon had to say - The song of Simeon. Anna too praises God and can't wait to tell everyone about the Messiah. But Simeon also cautions that it will not all be plain sailing. Jesus will cause divisions; he will cause revolution and

upend the status quo. Finally - foreshadowing the crucifixion - and filling Mary with a sense of foreboding perhaps, that there will be piercing heartache in the extreme.

But for the next 30 years Mary will nurture, support, guide and love her son.

Fast forward now to the scene depicted in the reading in John's Gospel [19:25 to 27] and the heart piercing scene is upon us. Jesus is dying on the cross. Those who love him are gathered round. Jesus knowing what must be done has a last act and that is to bestow upon the Mother who: bore him, held him, loved him and presented him in the Temple and the disciple 'whom he loved'; an act of adoption.

To create between those two a contract which is the same one he extends to us all through our baptisms and beyond. As one of the Eucharistic prayers has it; 'In Christ you shared our life that we might live in him and he in us. He opened wide his arms upon the cross and, with a love stronger than death he made for all a perfect sacrifice for sin'.

Colin