

## Sermon – 14<sup>th</sup> March 2021 – Mothering Sunday

### Part 1

First, I must apologise for putting the readings round the wrong way – starting with the gospel reading, and then following it with the Old Testament. It's just that the gospel reading helps me to set the scene.

You will remember that it isn't all that long ago that we heard this morning's gospel reading, as part of a longer passage that we heard on Candlemas, the feast of the presentation of Christ at the Temple. The words that we hear this morning come towards the end of what Simeon has to say to Mary and Joseph. If you remember, he has been waiting his whole life for this moment – to see the Lord's Messiah. And as soon as he encounters Jesus, he knows that the moment has arrived.

It is, however, a profoundly poignant moment. Simeon is elated. He recognises Jesus immediately, and understands that his life's work is complete. And yet that means his own earthly life is coming to an end. While Simeon himself is at peace with that, we still understand that there will be sadness for those who know him.

And we are also faced with Simeon's words to Mary. His recognition that being the mother of the Lord's Messiah is not the path to an easy life. That she will endure pain and suffering, as well as joy.

What Simeon says to Mary, specific though it is to all that will play out in her own life, is to some extent true for us all. Life is rarely straightforward. The gift of life, love and relationship brings joy and delight. And it also exposes us to the very real possibility of loss and pain.

If we reflect for a moment on the story of Mary, Joseph and Jesus up to this point, we can clearly see the ups and the downs. Mary's joy at conceiving, alongside the fear of Joseph's response. The couple's commitment to one another, coupled with the prospect of a gruelling journey just at the time their first child is due. The desperation at finding nowhere to stay, followed by the relief of being offered shelter in a stable. And these patterns will continue. Just as they do for all of us. Life in all its richness, for better and for worse.

Before we hear our second reading, take a few moments to reflect on the last twelve months. On the highs and the lows; the ups and the downs. Throughout the three periods of lockdown, what has given you encouragement, and what has brought challenges?

### Part 2

So our context is a recognition of the complexity of our lives. That none of us will get through without experiencing a panoply of emotions. The good times and the bad.

And into that wider context, we set the very specific story of Moses. A baby born to a Levite woman at a time when Pharaoh had ordered that all Hebrew boy children should be killed at birth. Little wonder, then, that Moses's mother hid him. From the very beginning, his life was in danger.

Yet his mother refused to accept that this was inevitable – and so did a range of people around her. Pharaoh's daughter; Moses's sister. And so, as the story is told, we begin to see the community of

people, each committed to protecting and nurturing the baby boy; each of whom refused to accept that his life should be forfeited for such an arbitrary reason.

As we follow the story of Moses, we discover just how significant the actions of those women were. The part Moses will play in the story of the people of Israel is profound, leading them out of slavery in Egypt. And yet one of the reasons that he is such a relatable figure is that he never considered himself to be a born leader. Just as those women gave a high priority to care and compassion within their community, saving the life of the baby Moses, so others would play equally significant roles in Moses's adult life, helping him to take on the mantle of leadership and grow and develop his skills.

Throughout Exodus, we are reminded that God was with Moses – and that was crucial, just as it is for each of us, recognising that we are each known and loved by God, that we are each created to be the unique individual that only we can be. Yet God often works through people, too. Hearing the story of the baby Moses reminds us that his life was saved by a community of people who nurtured and protected him.

And so for us, too. You may have heard the African proverb “it takes a village to raise a child”, and we recognise how true it is. Perhaps during the last year we have become just a little more aware of the ways in which the people round about us make a significant difference in our lives. We may be able to identify individuals we simply did not know prior to the first lockdown who took it upon themselves to foster a sense of community even when it was the most difficult. We may also recognise that there are people who have always been important in our lives who we long to be able to spend proper time with. Telephone calls and online chats are a good way to maintain contact, but probably we all know that they are not the same as actually being in the same place.

In the church calendar, Mothering Sunday used to be the occasion when people would return to their mother church. Presumably when they did so, they would maintain important relationships with family and friends from those places. I expect we long to do the same with family and friends scattered around the country and perhaps the world.

So, on this Mothering Sunday, let's remember the significance of mothering. It isn't just what mothers do – though many of us know mothers who do just that. So many individuals are involved in building communities of compassion, in which we will nurture and care for one another, just as Moses was nurtured as a baby. And in so doing, we begin to change the world.

Amen