

Mothering Sunday 2019

On this Sunday in 2018, I talked about Holy Trinity being a Maternity unit...a place where faith was born.

During Lent this year, I have been holding confirmation classes for both adults and young people to explore if they are ready to make public their faith; their being "born again".

For some people (age is irrelevant) there is a definite spiritual birth moment. They can remember a time and place where they made that leap of faith and invited Christ into their lives.

For others, it's a much longer process involving family faith background, school, church, friends, colleagues and it's only when looking back they realise that this is their faith, this is what they believe, they are ready to make that public.

The candidates will be going to Reading Minster on Easter Saturday to be confirmed by Bishop Andrew and if you can come and support them there that will be wonderful. (Evening 7:30pm) It will also be wonderful to share communion together on Easter Day here at Holy Trinity.

Mothering Sunday celebrates the church as a "Mothering Church" a place where faith is born and nurtured and raised. Of course it's much more widely celebrated as a day to show love and affection to our own Mothers.

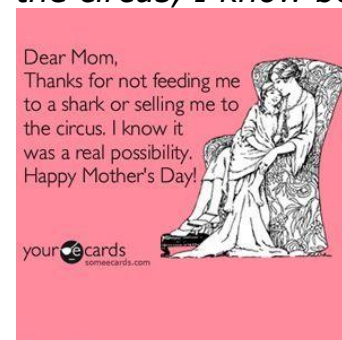
Katherine and I were shopping for cards a little while ago and I spotted one I thought I would send my Mum.

Thank you for not selling me to the circus.



While looking for this image I found some other cards that are slightly disturbing.

Thank you for not feeding me to a shark or selling me to the circus, I know both were real possibilities.



And I liked this simple image

Thanks for being there. Mum help. Everything will be fine.



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This Sunday though can be a day to be endured for some. Those who Mum is no longer with them, those who didn't get on or didn't know their Mum, those who didn't have the opportunity to be a Mum.

It's here that the Mothering Church, reflecting the love and compassion of God can offer solace, perhaps by simply sharing the pain and being able to bring it to God.

Stories too like our Old Testament reading allow us to recognise that being a Mother is rarely straightforward.

Mothers can endure great embarrassment. I know a Mum called Becky who had her youngest boy Joe with her on the bus when a very pregnant lady got on. Joe asked in a loud voice "why is that lady so fat"? It's moments like that, that age a person.

Most of us know the story of Moses in the bulrushes and Sunday School pictures like this come to mind...



Let the real story be told and remembered.

The Egyptians had enslaved the Israelites but were becoming increasingly anxious that the slave nation would rebel and overthrow them. They instructed the Hebrew midwives to kill any baby boys and although the midwives found cunning ways to avoid carrying out the instruction, male babies were under sentence of death.

A male baby is born to a Levite, they were the priestly tribe of the Hebrew people. The way the story is told you might think Moses was the first child – clearly there is at least one older sibling, a sister.

After 3 months Moses is hidden in a floating basket with his sister camped nearby to keep an eye on him.

The story is told to show that God's hand was on Moses life from the beginning. Unlike other remarkable Mothers and babies in the bible, there's nothing unique or special about his conception and birth (Compared say to Samuel, Samson, John the Baptist, Jesus)

But under the threat of Death not only does Moses survive, he's brought up as a prince in Egypt, the country he will do battle with to free the Hebrews from slavery.

He's brought up under the protection of the Princess and is nursed by his own Mother.

Which reminds me of another story.

A rather ill-prepared student was taking a life-sciences exam and had to answer the question. "Give four advantages of breast milk".

Desperate for anything to write he put

1. No need to boil
2. Cats can't steal it
3. Available whenever necessary

Desperate for the fourth advantage he wrote

4. Available in attractive container.

Moses was born under a severe threat to his life...God rescued him through his mother's ingenuity, his sisters diligence and quick wittedness and Divine intervention.

Jesus was also born under strange circumstances and before he was very old his life was threatened. By Divine intervention Joseph smuggled Mary and Jesus away from Bethlehem to, of all places, Egypt, to avoid Herod's wrath.

In today's gospel reading, Jesus is about the same age as Moses in his basket and is taken to the temple to be consecrated to the Lord. This scene becomes the life-time fulfilment of a promise God made to Simeon that he should see the Christ before his death. Taking the child, Simeon prays the words we know as the Nunc Dimittes, which is Latin for "now you dismiss".

'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss³⁰ your servant in peace.

³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.'

Moses became the leader of the Israelites and led them out of slavery. Jesus is the one by whom all can be saved from slavery to sin and death.

Their mothers showed bravery and ingenuity, and ultimately let them go to follow the path God had for them at very great cost to themselves. The church needs to reflect these qualities too.

The church doesn't have a great track record in bringing to birth and nurturing. Far too often there are stories of the church bruising and damaging individuals and diminishing their faith. Too often there are stories of restricting young people and confining them rigidly to the practices of a particular church and when something occurs the whole of their faith construct is shattered. It's as if the church becomes a controlling and fearful parent, desperately holding on. We should learn from the mothers in the Bible.

The church too has struggled in its language about God. Jesus showed us the true compassion and tenderness of God, His love and faithfulness, how He holds all in his heart.

The closest we get is the Eucharist prayer G will shall use today

You have created all things
You have made us in your image
You give us breath and speech

(Which echoes giving birth)

How wonderful the works of your hand, O Lord, as a mother tenderly gathers her children, you embraced a people as your own. When they turned away and rebelled, your love remained steadfast.

How might we let Mothering Sunday guide our life as a church?
Firstly we do give thanks for our Mothers, for those we are

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mothers and for all the women who bring to the church their compassion, care, nurturing and love.

Secondly, we deliberately develop as a church so that mothering qualities are embedded in who we are.

At the PCC away day in May, one of our shared tasks is to consider the qualities we have as a church and to do more than just say...loving, welcoming, nurturing. What does that mean and look like in the church? We have great examples to build on.

The children and youth leaders sharing the faith story with our youth. The pastoral team loving and caring all who they reach out to. Caring cuisine which takes food to those we need to show love to. School governorship and those who undertake that responsibility.

May we truly be a Mothering Church and in doing so reflect God's mothering qualities. And let's not feed anyone to the sharks!

Amen.