

John 19.25b-27; Exodus 2.1-10; Colossians 3.12-17.
Mothering Sunday (Lent 4) 15th March 2015
8:00 a.m. & 10:00 a.m. at St. Andrew's, Totteridge

'Letting Go' & 'Taking In'

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart always be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer (Ps.19:14).

Even in the season of Lent, Sundays are feast days and, I'm happy to tell you, we are allowed, indeed required, to keep them as such! What a relief! And an especial relief today, when we want to celebrate and give thanks for our mothers, and all they mean to us, no doubt with a certain amount of festive indulgence all round. So we can let go the disciplines of Lent a little today. Let go, and take in, these are the themes of my talk this morning.

But first, letting go! I heard about someone who was given a fridge magnet, on which were the words, 'Save the planet – it's the only one with chocolate'! Well, I imagine chocolate, wine and flowers may all feature in our celebrations today, and quite right too. All this is very special and important, and I'm sure all our warmest wishes go out today to all the mothers we know, and their children; enjoy Mothering Sunday.

O yes, and by the way, today is Mothering Sunday. I know that the majority of cards being opened by mothers this morning will wish them a happy Mother's Day, but that's an American import. Mother's Day took off in the United States early last century as a national celebration, not of motherhood in general but of individual mothers by their own families. But in England the correct name is Mothering Sunday, which originally meant something quite different.

Sadly, like the American grey squirrel pushing out our native red, 'Mother's Day' seems to be sweeping all before it. At least we haven't adopted the American date – the second Sunday in May. We still use the traditional fourth Sunday of Lent, which is also known as Refreshment Sunday: 15th March this year.

It all began in the middle-ages as a day-off from the rigours of Lent, in honour of the Virgin Mary. The practice developed of giving people time off to celebrate this holy day ('holiday') to visit their Mother Church – a cathedral like St Albans Abbey. For those working away, this brought an opportunity to make a rare visit home – picking a nosegay of wild flowers for mum on the way - and the tradition of Mothering Sunday was born.

But the English Mothering Sunday also points to something bigger than the individual family – what The Queen in her Diamond Jubilee message called 'the power of togetherness and the convening strength of family, friendship and good neighbourliness.' - **but**, it also needs to be said that Mothering Sunday can be a bitter day for many people – those mothers & children who are estranged from, or worried about one another, & for the childless, the single & the divorced. In fact anyone who doesn't live in a warm, united & loving family: can find a day like today difficult.

Thoughts like this make us pause don't they, but then, we're also pulled up short by the Gospel reading for today, John 19. 25b – 27. What a poignant, heart-rending story that is. It has nothing to do with joy or celebration, but shows us Mary at the Cross, and her moment of agony as she has to **let her son go** and refocus her whole life. This takes us deep into the experience of mother-hood and therefore has much to teach Mother church, and all of us who are part of that church.

Our gospel story is a story about letting go, just as the Levite woman had to let go of her son in the story from Exodus, placing him in a basket to be found by the daughter of Pharaoh. The gospel describes the moment when Mary had to let go of her son, physically and finally, and our hearts must go out to any mother, then or now, who experiences this. Today must be very difficult for them. But less traumatic ‘letting go’s’ happen throughout the mothering process. It begins at the crèche or school gate and continues until the young leave home, probably long beyond that.

Mary herself would have needed to let go of all her mother’s dreams and expectations for Jesus; the hope that he might marry, have children, continue the family business, and so on. But she had to learn that she could not remain centre stage in her child’s life – she could not any longer control him or mould him, but had to let him go to follow his own path.

But our scripture today also offers stories about ‘taking in’. We heard about the kindness of the Pharaoh’s daughter, about how she took Moses in to be her own. In the reading from Colossians, Paul offers us a real gem of an encapsulation of Christian teaching, about how we should take in by “[clothe... ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience... forgiving each other... and clothe \(y\)ourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.](#)” ‘Take in’ this reading to your heart today, cut it from the reading sheet and stick it on your fridge, in your locker at school, on the mirror in your bathroom – it’s gold dust!

Jesus, who had to be taken in and offered sanctuary even at his birth, makes this Pauline teaching, to ‘take in’ with all compassion, come alive, and we hear about how he turns to the beloved disciple and tells him in such simple, poignant words,

‘Woman, here is your son,’ and to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother. And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.’

This, I want to suggest, is the essence of ‘motherhood’ everywhere; men can be good mothers too. The selfless act of one who gives sanctuary to life other than its own; that ‘takes in’ in love, with all mercy - to harbour, protect and to nurture, expecting nothing in return; and then with all love, even to the extent of being prepared to endure pain, gives out, ‘lets go’, allows the fledgling to leave the nest, the child to become the adult, granting freedom to their beloved as God grants freedom to us all.

Spoken in the name of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit. Amen.

John 19.25b-27

²⁵And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' ²⁷Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

Exodus 2.1-10

Birth and Youth of Moses

2

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. ²The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him for three months. ³When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. ⁴His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him. ⁵The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. ⁶When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. 'This must be one of the Hebrews' children,' she said. ⁷Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?' ⁸Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Yes.' So the girl went and called the child's mother. ⁹Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.' So the woman took the child and nursed it. ¹⁰When the child grew up, she brought him to

Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, 'because', she said, 'I drew him out of the water.'

Colossians 3.12-17.

¹²As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

The New Revised Standard Version (Anglicized Edition), copyright 1989, 1995 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.