

Sunday 22nd March 2020

Mothering Sunday.

Exodus 2:1-10; John 19:25-27

This morning we have read 2 stories about mothers – one about Moses and the care that Moses' mother, Jocabed, had for him – and the other story was about Jesus and the care he had for his mother.

We're going to look at our Bible reading from Exodus first, it's a well known story. Looking at the context, the Israelites had lived in Egypt for many years. A new Pharaoh was ruling Egypt, He was very worried about the increasing number of Israelites – there was a danger if Egypt was invaded, that the Israelites might join up with their enemy, and because there were nearly as many Israelites as Egyptians, Egypt could lose the battle. The Egyptian slave masters were very cruel and drove the Hebrews very hard. But the Hebrews still continued to have lots of children. Pharaoh instructed the Hebrew midwives that they were to kill all the baby boys that they delivered. But the midwives feared God more than Pharaoh and disobeyed him. Pharaoh found out about their disobedience, but they said that the babies were born too quickly before they got there.

Our story starts with Jocabed and Amram having a little baby boy. Jocabed hid him for 3 months, but couldn't hide him any longer, so she made a little basket of papyrus for him – she made it waterproof by coating it with tar and pitch. She placed it among the reeds along the bank of the river Nile as his sister kept watch from a distance. Pharaoh's daughter came down to the river to bathe. Her attendants were walking along the riverbank, she noticed the basket and told a slave girl to pick it up. She was surprised to see a baby crying and felt sorry for him. She said, 'He's one of the Hebrew babies.' The baby's sister asked Pharaoh's daughter if she should get one of the Hebrew

women to nurse the baby. She went and got her mother, Pharaoh's daughter asked her to take the baby and she would pay her. Jocabed took her baby home. When he got older, she took him back to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, because she drew him out of the water.

This is a lovely story isn't it? But, it's far more than that. As we know, Moses grew up and became one of the great leaders and judges of Israel. We note in the story that Jocabed found him to be a "fine child", and how tender is God's care that Jocabed did bring him up for the first few years of his life until he was weaned – later than our normal time – probably about 5.

Moses, brought up in the royal household, received the best education – all part of God's wider plan to prepare and equip Moses for the role he had for him. Moses would have learned all the history of the Israelites and their worship of the one true God from his mother, Jocabed, as opposed to pagan Egypt. He would have remembered these stories. God had chosen Moses to bring about his rescue plan to bring freedom for his children, the Israelites, from their slavery in Egypt into the Promised Land.

This story shows God's intricate planning – nothing is left to chance. Jocabed was brave, she recognised something very special about this baby. She was obedient and trusted in God.

I want to fast forward now to the birth of Jesus. A very young girl, Mary, had a message from an angel that she was going to have God's baby. It was unheard of, but Mary was obedient, "I am the Lord's servant" Mary answered, "May your word to me be fulfilled." (Luke 1:38) You know the story.

Fast forward again to our reading from John 19, the end of Jesus' earthly ministry and his crucifixion.

Picture the scene. A hill outside Jerusalem, 3 stark crosses stand out. Round the middle cross, a group of women and a man are gathered. They look up at the cross – this cross is different, there’s a sign on it – “King of the Jews”. There’s a crown on his head, but it’s made of thorns. His body is battered, bruised and bleeding, hardly recognisable. He looks down with compassion, even in this time of great suffering and pain, a look of compassion on his face. He looks tenderly at his mother and the others, and with a superhuman effort he says, “Woman, here is your son”, and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” A little later, after requesting a drink, Jesus says, “It is finished” and gives up his spirit.

That event that changed history at that particular time was dying on that cross – Easter Sunday hadn’t yet come. So for the crowds that were there, it seemed final. It was a dangerous place to be, and Jesus was obviously concerned for his mother’s safety, comfort and protection. Jesus was, for all intents and purposes, a criminal, so there would have been great fear and they could have been imprisoned themselves. We don’t know the thoughts that went through Mary’s mind as she stood at the foot of the cross – we can only imagine how distraught she must have felt – and probably remembered all those years ago the meeting in the Temple with Simeon and Anna, and Simeon’s words to her, ‘a sword will pierce your own soul too.’ Luke 2:33-35.

Today, we celebrate Mothering Sunday, the Mother Church. These are just two of the stories about mothers in the Bible. What can we learn from them? Both were part of God’s plan. Jocabed, in recognising that Moses was special, risked her own life in protecting and caring for him, and rooting him in his faith in God. Mary, at a young age, a visit from an angel, and her life was to change for ever. She was obedient in the face of many social and cultural

difficulties. Mary watched her son die on the cross. There are no words to describe what she must have felt.

Through both these readings we witness the overwhelming plans and sovereignty of God, Moses was chosen by God to lead his children from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. Jesus, God's one and only Son, fulfilled God's rescue plan for the whole of humanity by dying in our place on the cross, our sins forgiven through God's amazing grace – no one is outside God's love or forgiveness.

Jocabed and Mary were two mums who were a vital part of God's plans. All of us are part of God's plans too as we share his story and tell of his love.

PRAYER AND REFLECTION

Let us give thanks to God for our mothers, for all that they have done and continue to do for us, to shape us into the people we are today. Let us give thanks for their selflessness, care and concern, as well as all the practical, everyday things that we take for granted.

Let us pray for mothers everywhere, for those struggling to provide for their children

For all those whose relationships with their Mums – or Mums with their children – have been broken through Child Trafficking, War, Displacement, Addiction or any other reason. Pray for God's healing and reconciliation where possible.

Finally, let us reflect on our world today, as fear over the Coronavirus grows and the impact this is having on each and every one of us. Let us pray for God's peace, guidance, wisdom, skill and discernment for all governments, health workers, and all involved in working to combat this virus and keep us safe.