

Mothering Sunday

Reflection

The gospel reading may seem a strange place to start for Mothering Sunday. And yes, the main focus of the passage is on the prophetic destruction of Jerusalem. However, it is the almost incidental detail of the Lord comparing himself to a mother hen with the gentle image of chicks being gathered under her wings. For me, it shows the universal nature of mothering. Mothering is not just for mothers and not just for women. And for those who insist on the exclusively male characteristics of God—a mother hen challenges this—showing the paradox of protection and vulnerability required for the caring for little ones.

This inclusive aspect of God is important for those of us who may find Mothering Sunday difficult or painful. Perhaps you had a difficult relationship with your mother. Perhaps as a mother you have suffered the pain of child loss. Perhaps you may grieve not having your own child. Alternatively you may resent the assumption that childbearing is desired for fulfilment. I belong in the camp of not enjoying Mothering Sunday with having lost my mother aged six. I felt the pain of abandonment reinforced every year we made 'Mother's Day' cards at school. Schools could be insensitive places in the 1970s where it was announced to my class by the teacher, 'Matthew's mummy has died, now his daddy has to be a mummy and a daddy'. A bit thoughtless? Though the words stuck and take me to gospel passage where mothering is beyond gender and the Lord is someone who mothers as well as being a father to us.

The story of Ruth and Naomi is similarly affirming of loving relationships beyond male and female, child and mother. Ruth and Naomi show a great loyalty to one another, **"Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I**

will die, and there I will be buried". Such beautiful words of commitment and courageous love. These speak of such eternal truths that they have been appropriated by many Church wedding services to show the divine standard for the covenant of marriage. Very ironic, when Ruth and Naomi are not a married couple. The wonderful 'motherly-daughter' love is made more exceptional because, of course, they are not mother and daughter. Their connection is through the dead husband of Ruth, Naomi's son. Ruth is encouraged to start again, but doing so would mean abandoning Naomi, herself an older widow and alien in the land. Her prospects would not be good. What a beautiful story of sacrificial loving beyond natural family lines and relational patterns.

We should be encouraged, especially at this time of global pandemic and mass social isolation. We have a God that walks alongside us. He promises repeatedly to never abandon us nor forsake us. We also have a God that goes beyond our social conventions when it comes to gender roles and being far more inclusive than our narrow human thinking permits. My prayer this Mothering Sunday is for Church (that is all of us) to rediscover our capacity for motherhood. Whether we are young, old, male or female-who can we mother? Who risks being abandoned and left behind? Who needs our courageous vulnerability to protect them at this time. In this time of despair, let us claim for ourselves and share with others, the hope from **Isaiah 43, 'Do not fear. I have redeemed you. I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the flames, you will not be burned.'**

Reverend Matthew Gough, Mothering Sunday 2020.