

Lyn Valley Mission Community

Mothering Sunday

1 Samuel 1:20-end

Ps 127:1-4

2 Corinthians 1: 3-7

Luke 2: 33-35

In speaking and listening, may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

I probably need to start by saying that this might not seem like a conventional “Mothering Sunday” sermon. As I read our gospel in a week that began with International Women’s Day and ended with the cancellation of vigil planned to respond to the murder of a young woman as she walked home from meeting friends which has brought into sharp relief the level of violence against women in our society and across the world, Simeon’s words to Mary as he holds her child, Jesus, in his arms seemed compelling:

“the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too”

Holding the Son of God in his arms, Simeon’s own inner thoughts are revealed: even as he gives prophetic witness to the costly saving action that Jesus will complete, his heart goes out to the pain and plight of the mother, the woman before him. He understands her sacrifice and he cares about it.

Her experience is illuminated by an old man filled with the Holy Spirit who has been longing for the consolation of God’s people. It is being spoken of in a place where women were outsiders. As Mary was unable to go to the place of formal sacrifice in the Temple, this conversation must have taken place in an outer court, but here, even as the salvation of the world is being proclaimed, the woman’s experience is made evident too.

As I read that today, in the midst of the week we have had, and the day we honour the women in our lives, he speaks to me of God’s care and concern for Mary’s experience, which is so integral to Jesus’ identity and mission. God’s care and concern for women’s experience.

The writer of Luke’s gospel gives us the only record of this event, just as his is the only gospel to present the angel’s visit to Mary, and her response, to give a picture of the young mother’s experience of the Incarnation and her outpouring of joy at the God of liberation and the overturning of false powers, who chooses her to continue God’s mission in the world

My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour

Surely from now on all generations shall call me blessed

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly

It is Luke, who takes us with her on this journey to her older cousin, who is the first person to give Jesus the title “my Lord” when she hears of the pregnancy. It is her matronal blessing:

Blessed are you among women....blessed is she who believed there would be a fulfilment of what is spoken to her by the word

that invites Mary’s song of liberation.

Surely from now on all generations shall call me blessed.

Surely all generations shall see God’s blessing of women, God’s love of women.

Simeon says to her:

“the inner thoughts of many will be revealed”

This year we celebrate Mothering Sunday in a context where the reality has been revealed to us again that we still live in a world and a culture in which attitudes towards women are conflicted and there is a long way to go before the male dominated power patterns of our history have been brought down.

The Church has not been, and is not, entirely free of those patterns either. But God’s love for women, God’s care of women, God’s blessing of all conditions of women find expressions at the heart of the gospel: in Luke’s telling of Mary’s stories, in Jesus’ ministry to the most marginalised of women, in his inclusion of them among his travelling disciples, in their solidarity with his suffering at the foot of the cross, in the message of resurrection being given first to his companion Mary Magdalene, and his mother Mary gathering his disciples to pray as she awaited the Spirit.

Through the times and seasons of the church year, we have a chance to notice the matriarchal line of our faith – the women on whom the tradition of faith we inherit depends, our mothers and grandmothers in faith in whom and through whom God has worked in the world, in whom and through whom we have seen God’s love and tenderness, God’s fierce protection and passion, in whom and through whom we know God’s blessing.

And Mothering Sunday is such a time.

I invite you to look back over the stories of the people of God that you are familiar with and notice, where are the holy women, what is their experience and what might their gift of faith be that you inherit from them? And then give thanks for our matriarchs of faith.

Who are your own grandmothers and mothers in faith, godmothers in the widest sense? The women through whom you have seen God at work and who have helped you see blessings? Give thanks for their nurturing?

As you hold these women in your thoughts, can you get even a glimpse of the way God sees them? The way God holds them in a full and tender loving gaze, in the power of full blessing?

The inner thoughts of many will be revealed.....

Surely, all generations shall call her blessed.

I wonder, this Mothering Sunday in particular, if we as God's people are being called to live in ways that reveal that loving gaze of God for all women more fully, to be a people, like Elizabeth, that speak words to affirm that to every girl and women that she is blessed by God and challenge as unacceptable the attitudes, words and actions in our culture that by demeaning, damaging or disadvantaging women and girls diminish us all?

This is where I can return to the more traditional kind of Mothering Sunday sermon. We begin this revealing of God's loving gaze by turning on those who are close to us.

Today can we encourage children to show how they value their mothers and mother figures and nurture a deep respect for women in home life which is where everything starts?

Today can we hold our own mothers and mother figures in our hearts with love and thankfulness for giving us life, and in understanding and respect for their own challenges as women in the world?

And as we would usually take out posies of flowers as a symbol of blessing to the women we know; perhaps this year we could find out about one action we can take to improve the experience of women and girls in our family, village, our nation or our world.

It is my prayer that in our honouring of our mothers and mothers in faith and in our loving action in the world this Mothering Sunday we may be instruments of God who not only can reveal but can transform the inner thoughts of all. May we all see one another, men and women alike, as children of our loving God, together made in the image of God and renewed in that image through Jesus, Son of God and son of Mary. Amen