

Lent 4 – Mothering Sunday – 11 March 18  
Exodus 2:1-10; John 19:25b-27

Before I say a word about Mothering Sunday or the role of mothers, I need to acknowledge that not everyone has experienced the great gift that a loving mother can be. Not all have been privileged to have had a mother who loved selflessly and continuously and who always seemed to be right there knowing the perfect thing to say and understanding just what was needed in the moment.

I would also like to acknowledge that for many who are gathered here this morning, your mother may no longer be with you, and that can be a difficult reality to face sometimes.

And so, I invite each of you, men and women, to just “be” here in this place and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart and bring you comfort in the many ways that may take shape.

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This morning, on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent, as we gather right in the middle of this long penitential season, the Church, in all its wisdom, provides a little break, almost an intermission, during which we get to stretch our spiritual legs, break the fast for a moment and celebrate a joyous gift of relationship during a time when we face the greatest and deepest of sacrifices – that of walking with Jesus to his cross. This mid-Lent Sunday is also known as Mothering Sunday and it is a time when we all get to metaphorically go home to our “mother” church and to our mothers for a brief respite.

Many traditions have grown out of Mothering Sunday, including the sharing of the very sweet Simnel Cake that will be brought forward during the service to be blessed and which will then be shared at coffee hour after the liturgy. One of the traditions I have always liked the most was this one: On this 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent, servants in manor houses in England, and workers in factories, would be given a special day off so that they could go home for the day to see their mothers and also, so that they could go to worship *with* their mothers at their home church or their Mother Church. Quite often on this day, smaller parish churches would forgo their regular service so that entire congregations could travel to their local Cathedral, which was the area’s Mother Church. It was a day of good food, rest and most importantly, renewing of those oh-so-important relationships with mothers.

As we gather here today, our Diocese, and indeed Anglican churches worldwide, take this as an opportunity to uphold the Ministry of the Mothers’ Union within the Parish, the community, the Diocese, the country and around the world. Today we will do likewise with a special liturgy (for this service) [at the 10 am service].

The lessons that have been chosen for this Mothering Sunday speak not so much to the traditional understanding of motherhood as the parent-child relationship that grows from the biological bond between a woman and her child but rather the relationship that grows between a woman and another when God places them in relationship with intention. (Now lest the gentlemen of the crowd feel left out, this intentional relationship is not gender specific. Quite often God calls a man to nurture and raise up a child not his own as well!)

In Exodus we are given this beautiful story of sacrifice that leads to salvation (as Moses’ life is spared), grace (as his own mother is given the gift of nursing and loving him) and the

foreshadowing of that adoption that we all share as adopted members of God's kingdom (as Pharaoh's daughter takes Moses into her own home to raise him as her own son). Each of these gifts of sacrifice and salvation, grace and adoption are seen again in the Good Friday story that has Jesus himself offering the sacrifice which leads to salvation, sharing that grace that love will be continued between mother and son, and adoption as he gives his mother to the Beloved Disciple and gives the Beloved Disciple to his own mother.

In these lessons we are gently reminded that motherhood is not nearly as straightforward as it might seem. It is very much a choice made of sacrifice for the sake of salvation, grace and adoption. The truest, deepest and greatest gifts of motherhood, or fatherhood, are found in these three profound movements: sacrifice for the sake of saving; grace; adoption.

When we really take time to consider what it is that the most "successful" adults have had in their lives, we often find that people will speak about a strong foundation: parents or other adults who came alongside them from an early and influential age to teach them about integrity, hard work, perseverance, and often Faith. Many times we hear acceptance speeches at sports celebrations like the Football Hall of Fame, or at entertainment awards like the Oscars or the Grammy's and people will thank God and then thank their parents – and if you ever watch the NFL speeches you will hear more often than not about the incredible sacrifices and support that the mothers gave to their sons to help them achieve something that would give them a better life.

One of the most important gifts a person can give a child is that of a strong foundation of faith and integrity filled with grace. If our children grow up with a rock-solid foundation, one which they can trust that they will never be without, then we have given them the very best that we can give. Our children need to know that they are loved but, maybe more importantly, they need to know that they have relationships upon which they can lean, trusting that we will not let them fall.

The first thing we need to teach our children (and I speak of children of all ages) is that they have been given the incredible and never-ending gift of Jesus Christ. We need them to learn about and personally understand that Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice so that they could always know, and trust, that they are already okay – they are saved. They will not, and cannot be lost, no matter what. They need to understand that it is through grace that this gift of Jesus Christ has been given them. They do not need to earn it. They simply need to accept what is given them through grace. And then they need to own the truth that through Jesus' love and sacrifice they have been fully adopted into God's family. They are as much God's child as Jesus is. We need to help them understand that family by adoption is, in God's eyes, as family by birth and blood. Those who God receives into his family by adoption are family forever.

Three of the Mothers' Union international objectives are : to encourage parents to bring up their children in the faith and life of the Church; to promote conditions in society favourable to stable family life and the protection of children; and to help those whose family life has met with adversity. There is nothing new and earthshaking in these objectives. As a matter of fact, they are really simply extensions of what we all commit to whenever we Reaffirm our Baptismal Vows. The work that the Mothers' Union strives to share with the world is to exactly contribute to the strong foundations that every child, of every age deserves and needs so that they can grow and

thrive in the adopted life that they are sharing in God's kingdom – both here on earth and then eternally in heaven.

One of the incredible gifts that Mothers' Union offers to the Anglican Church, and in particular to the all the women of the Church, is the opportunity to participate in "mothering" in our communities.

Something that is so very encouraging about the Mothers' Union movement is that it recognizes that not all women, by choice or by chance, are 'mothers' in the traditional and biological sense of the word. For those women who have chosen not to have children, this movement allows them to participate in the great gifts of sacrifice, grace and adoption that mark God's call on his children *for* his children. For those who would like to have had children but were unable, the Mothers' Union offers a gentle and gracious forum in which their love and gifts can be shared in less traditional ways.

The Mothers' Union is in many ways sacramental – it is the outward and visible sign of the love God has given women to share with all of God's children.

This morning as you entered the church, you were given a rock [a symbol of a rock]. These are intended to represent both the incredible strength of the foundation that each and every one of you share with those children you have influenced or nurtured in the past and each of them that you continue to influence, whether you realize it or not, to this day. I invite you to hold this symbol in your hand and acknowledge the importance of your place in the foundation we are making here at St. James for the children of our community.

I would also like you to take some time to thin about your own mothers, or those other people in your life, who have helped to build your foundation of faith. They may be people you still see everyday or they may be those you said farewell to many moons ago. As you hold your symbol, give thanks for the sacrifices and the grace they have given to you.

During Communion, when you come forward to receive the gift of sacrifice of grace and adoption that is the Body and Blood of Christ, I invite you to lay your symbol of foundation down around the base of the cross. Allow your own gifts and your memories to grow that foundation that begins with Christ, continued with those who raised us and carries on with us today and all who will come after us. And when you go back to your pew following Communion, take a look at the strength of that foundation that began with Jesus and which we now have the privilege of continuing on into the future ...