

2014- 3- 30 Sue Diggory

Mothering Sunday

I Samuel 1 20 – 28 & John 19 25 – 27

Waiting for a gift ... and being prepared to return it

Today is Mothering Sunday, the fourth Sunday in Lent and for many a welcome diversion from the austerity of the season, a chance to turn away briefly from Lenten fasting and turn towards the celebration of motherhood. For many it is a special day, a day for breakfast in bed, a day for someone else to cook the lunch and for some a day for presents!

But we must also be mindful that for some Mothering Sunday, or Mother's Day as it has become better known as can be a very difficult day – a day when we remember mums who are no longer with us, mums who we may have found difficult to love at times, or for some of a day to reflect on children who never were or are no longer with us now. So amid our joyful celebrations as we gather here this morning let's remember and be sensitive to the needs of those who may not be feeling so enthusiastic today, for those who will not be spending time celebrating with their families

But let's reflect for a few moments about what has already been happening here in Crockham Hill this morning; as I have one or two questions for you this morning.

- Who didn't have to get breakfast today who usually does?
- Who had something unusual for breakfast, perhaps cold tea or burnt toast?
- Who's cooking the lunch today who doesn't usually do so?
- Who's being taken out to lunch today?
- Who's had a special card or present today? Maybe flowers? Chocolates of possibly even a bottle of something fizzy?

So we can see that for some of us today has already been difference, and for all of us there has been at least one difference; an hour less in bed.

Now we are going to spend a few moments thinking about presents or 'gifts'

What do we say when someone gives us a present?

We say THANK YOU, and some of us will have sent a card to our mum's today saying 'thank you' for being my mum.

I wonder if you have you ever had to wait a long time for a special present? Perhaps you wanted 'it' for Christmas but I didn't appear and then you had to carry on waiting until your birthday came for another chance, and as one with a July birthday I know that can be a very long wait!

How does it feel to keep waiting – never ending, tedious, endless?

Maybe that is what the last year has seemed like during your interregnum – last Easter you said farewell to Father Bob and although Father Stephen, Barbara and David Flagg have been taking great care of you, you have been waiting for your new vicar, and I hope I don't disappoint you too much, and for Richard and me, we have been waiting to come to Crockham Hill and become part of your community, and although it hasn't been never ending and certainly not tedious it has seemed to take a long time!

So, how does it feel when the 'gift' you were waiting for finally arrives – are you excited, relieved the waiting is over, perhaps you couldn't wait to see what it was like?

But just for a moment think about how you would feel if when you got up the following day your longed for gift or present had been taken away from you, and it was no longer yours?

That is what happened to the 'gift' we heard about in our OT reading today, the story of Hannah and her much wanted and longed for little boy Samuel.

Hannah and Samuel lived long before Jesus was born, about 1,000 years before. Elkanah, Hannah's husband had 2 wives, that was quite usual in those days Penninah and Hannah, and although Penninah had children she used to make fun of Hannah because she didn't, which was very unkind. This made Hannah very sad and she prayed to God and asked him to give her a child.

If you read the story in the first part of chapter 1 of the book of Samuel you will see that Hannah spent a long time asking God for a child. Eventually her prayer was answered and she had a little boy who she called Samuel 'because I asked the Lord for him'

In many ways that should have been the end of the story – a good and happy ending, because Hannah’s prayers had been answered and she had received the gift she had longed for.

I’m sure Hannah loved Samuel deeply and wanted to keep him at home with her BUT she knew Samuel was a gift from God, an answer to her prayers and she wanted to find a way of giving him back to him, of dedicating him to God, something that as his mother must have been very hard for her to do. Our reading tells us that when he was a little boy she took him to the Temple and left him with Eli the priest saying ‘I prayed for this child and the Lord has granted me what I asked him. So now I give him to the Lord for his whole life.’

Hannah chose to give Samuel back to God and for her it meant letting go of him at a very young age, it meant being prepared to return and release the gift she had longed for so long, being content only to see him once a year when she visited the temple. Those of us here today who are mothers of grown up children know what it is to be prepared to release those we love, to allow them to live their own lives trusting that our love and care will sustain them as they make their own choices and follow their own paths, and that is of course just what God does for us his children as he ‘mothers’ us, as he gives us freedom and freewill to make our own life choices, to follow our own paths hoping that we will choose to be sustained by his love and seek to build an ongoing relationship with his son Jesus.

But this morning we have also heard of another mother, this time in our Gospel reading, another mother who is preparing to give her son back to God, a mother who is preparing to let go, as she stands at the foot of the cross watching the agony of a painful death slowly overtaking her son. Standing at the foot of the cross Mary, like Hannah is preparing to give back her ‘gift’ from God, although not like Hannah by her own deliberate choice.

Hannah and Mary are two examples of mothers who let go and give back their ‘gifts’ to God. Hannah when her son was a little boy and Mary when her son was a grown man. Hannah gave her son back to God and he grew up to become a great prophet, the one who God used to anoint the future King David, and as Mary witnessed the death of her Son, as she watched him being given ‘back to God’, as he took all the pain and suffering of the world on his shoulders, she watched the beginning of the miracle of salvation that would be completed with the resurrection of her son on Easter Day, the event that gives us the way to eternal life if we choose it for our selves today.

Not many mothers are called to such extremes but all mothers know the bittersweet feelings that come with being prepared to love and let go; of letting our children grow up, to be themselves and to live their own lives – even when we think we could do it better!

We may not like the way they look, we may not like the friends they have, but we are called to love them and to pray for them and to release them back to God

Today as we give thanks for all mothers, and for those who mother, for all those who care for us, remembering that it can be a hard and sometimes painful job, especially when it comes to letting go, to letting go of a treasured and valued gift. As we sit quietly lets take a moment to reflect on those God has called us to care for in our families, in our natural families and in the village family here in Crockham Hill and lets like Hannah and Mary place them in his care.

Amen