

Mothers – and others

**Mothering Sunday, 4th Sunday of Lent, 10th March 2024,
Holy Communion at 8.30am**

Readings [Exodus 2.1-10](#), [John 19.25b-27](#)

A question as we listen to the story of Moses' birth:

Who's holding the baby now?

Previously in the book of Exodus: the Israelites are slaves in Egypt, and Pharaoh the ruler is worried that there are too many of them, so he issues an order that all male Israelite babies should be killed. One couple hides their baby boy in a basket in the river.

Whose holding the baby now? No-one - but the boy's sister keeps an eye on him. The Pharaoh's daughter, sees the basket and sends one of her people to investigate.

Whose holding the baby now? A princess (or rather, her maid, as HRH is uber-posh) – but now, up pops the sister: 'You look like you need a nanny. Shall I sort that for you?'

Whose holding the baby now? The baby's own mother, masquerading as a childcare professional.

To be a mother – the person we give special thanks for this Mothering Sunday – is a unique calling, and at its heart is the nurturing of new life. But the only way Moses' mother can nurture her new child is by sharing his care with others. And there will come a terrible moment when she has to hand him back to the princess, or else her cover will be blown.

According to the World Health Organisation, around 180 women will give birth today in Gaza, and what risks will they have to take, like Moses' parents, to help their children survive? In this country, thank God, children are not usually born in such danger; but it's still true that, to give the best care to a child, the mother (or whoever is the main carer) will need to share that care with others: with a partner, sisters, brother, aunt or uncle, grandparents, friends; with playgroup leaders, childminders, nannies, teachers; and others. And that sharing means that this day is for them too.

The high street calls today Mother's Day, a day for a particular person whose kids can then be persuaded to buy her flowers and chocolate. And you either are that person or you aren't.

The Church calls today Mothering Sunday, and you know the difference between '-er' and '-ing'. 'I'm not really a gardener but, OK, I'll do some gardening,' or, 'I'm not a painter but I'll do some painting in your new flat,' and so on (it doesn't work so well with solicitors).

So today is a day for particular people – mothers – but also a day to celebrate a way of being that is open to anyone who is called to nurture another's life. It's not just about 'Who or what am I?' but, 'What am I open to?' 'Who is God calling me to care about?'

If you are a young person, then mothers, fathers and others share in the sacred task of nurturing you. These are the people – some paid, some volunteers, at home, at school, here at church – to thank God for today.

But there's more to this than who holds the baby. It's not just about the care of children. The Gospel reading brings us to Good Friday, and Jesus dying on a cross. The people who depend on him – who will care for them now? By the cross are two such people, fellow adults, his mother and a disciple – it's [the scene you can see](#) just above the high altar under our new work of art.

In eight short words, 'Here is your mother...here is your son,' Jesus invites each to offer the other love, protection and nurture. There is no link of blood or biology between them, they have no relation to each other at all apart from both being close to Jesus – and that is enough. The writer doesn't name either of them, they are just 'the mother', 'the disciple'. They stand for more than themselves. He could be you, she could be me.

We each have our identity, one we've chosen or one the world gives us, and there are things to give thanks for there, but God may have more for us than that. In the new world that Jesus makes possible, what matters is not just 'Who am I?' 'What am I?' but 'Whose am I?' 'Where am I?' 'Who am I close to?' and being close to Jesus can make new things possible. That closeness is the very thing that Jesus offers us in this service, as he invites us to eat at his table.