

CHESTER CATHEDRAL MOTHERING SUNDAY – 14.3.10

ALL-AGE SERMON

THEMES: Love, Home, Family

Bible Ref's: Exodus 2: 1-100
Luke 2: 33-35

Let's start with a question. If I get a letter marked "Fragile", what is it telling me to do? (Handle with Care)

I feel a bit like that about the message of Mothering Sunday – it's a wonderful message but needs to be handled with great care, carefully considered, if the whole emphasis is on **Mothers** then what about children and adults who have no mothers – for whatever reason?

If today is all about **families** then what about those whose experience of family life is sad and unhappy? So instead, as our starting point, let's highlight a word that appeared 4 times in the last hymn we sang and will appear 8 times in our Final hymn – have a quick look at it on p.11 of the service sheets, especially v.2. That key word is Love.

"God is love; and he enfoldeth

All the world in one embrace;

With unfailing grasp he holdeth

Every child of every race.

And when human hearts are breaking

*Under sorrow's iron rod,
Then they find that selfsame aching
Deep within the heart of God."*

Yes, God has blessed us with Mothers and Fathers, brothers and sisters, families and friends. But if we dare to speak of real love we must be ready for the whole range of emotion and experience, joy and sorrow.

Actually, if we dare to listen to little children they sometimes have some very wise and thoughtful things to say about love. Here are some quotes I found from Lynn and Bobby, Raj, Alice and James – all between 4 and 9 years old:-

"Love is important, because if people did not love each other there wouldn't be any people."

"True love is when something has died and you still remember it – like my hamster."

"If I was God I would go to all the countries and say LOVE EACH OTHER and stop being greedy."

"You have to love your baby brother, otherwise he gets wind!"

And finally:

"You must take care of love – if you don't it goes bad."

And now I wonder if some of our Sunday school children and Girl Choristers can help me out by holding up some letters? (H.R.O.M.T.E)

OK, can anyone see what word we can make from these letters?

Can you turn around and show your letters to the clergy and choir? Of course they'll have to switch the backwards filter on in their brain so they read "mother" and not "rehtom"!

Our 2 bible readings today have each mentioned a special mother to show how love is tested sometimes in very difficult circumstances.

Think of Mary. The old man Simeon in the temple at Jerusalem blessed her and Joseph, but he said to Mary "...a sword will pierce your own soul too."

So even when Jesus was a babe in arms his mother was being told

"It's not going to be easy, being the mother of God's son."

No doubt there were many of the regular, usual worries as Jesus grew up, as a baby, as a boy – remember that family trip to Jerusalem when Mary and Joseph lost Jesus – 12 years old and on his own and on his own in the capital city – yes, that had been a big worry for Mary and Joseph .

But it was Mary, years later, who stood close to the cross as her dear son was cruelly killed. No words could describe how she felt. Maybe she remembered the words of old Simeon "And sorrow, like a sharp sword, will break your own heart."

Mary had that bond of love with her son.

Let's have the word held up again.

And let's think about the mother of Moses, Jochebed – her name isn't mentioned in this reading, but it's mentioned later on.

Without Jochebed's bond of love with baby Moses he simply would not have survived.

As you read the story you see that others played a vital role too, Moses' sister who watched from a distance and was brave enough to approach Pharaoh's daughter "Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women?"

What quick thinking and daring! You bet she knew a good nurse for Moses – Jochebed – his own mother!

And we mustn't forget Pharaoh's daughter who took Moses as her son when he was older.

And the rest, as they say, is history – in this case very much God's history – salvation history – because Moses would be the one to lead the children of Israel to the Promised Land.

Can we lose 2 letters from the word please? R and T.

Now we're down to 4 letters. What word can you make from these?

(HOME)

Over 80 years ago my Grandma was “in service” as many other women and men were. They were employed as cooks, butlers, nannies, housemaids and workmen to wealthy families and they were given very little time off to visit their own families.

So for many, Mothering Sunday was a Godsend, an Oasis, especially coming in the middle of Lent, when you could go back to the family home, go to your home church and spend time with your Mum and all your family.

As with many things, American ways have influenced and altered our English ways, so Mothering Sunday is known by most folk today as Mothers’ Day.

I feel strongly that it’s worth keeping the concept and idea of “Mothering” alive, Mothering and nurturing at home, at school, at church where our faith is nurtured and where our spiritual life can grow.

Mothering Sunday, properly understood, is never exclusive or narrow. It celebrates motherhood in its widest sense, and points to a quality of love, a kind of loving that every one of us needs if we are to thrive.

Which brings us to the last word. Can we remove the letters O and H?

What’s left? (ME)

Well actually, all the “me’s” in this cathedral and the Mothering Sunday message has brought us right back to God’s love which is where we began – in his love he holds every child of every race – every adult too.

And if God loves me and you and all people everywhere, then we have to keep learning what God's special love is all about...

So let's finish with some words of St. Paul that point us in the right direction. Living out God's love in our daily lives.

Following the lead of our young people here, please say the word "LOVE" 8 times, and each time you say it, I'll say a short sentence, which explains more about how we show God's love to be real.

(LOVE) is patient and kind

.....is not jealous or conceited

..... is not ill-mannered or selfish.

..... does not insist on its own way.

..... does not keep a record of wrongs

..... is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth

..... never gives up, and its faith, hope and patience never fail

..... is eternal, it lasts forever.

Canon Christopher Humphries