

Year B Mothering Sunday

1 Samuel 1: 20-28

Colossians 3: 12-17

John 19: 25-27

### **Mothering and families**

Well, I am sure we all know that today is Mothering Sunday, and definitely not Mother's Day. It seems to me that the latter is a way of creating a commercial benefit for card companies, florists, and chocolate makers. The former, Mothering Sunday, harks back to a tradition of servants returning home to visit family and go back to their 'mother church' on this Sunday each year.

It was a time of getting back together with your family and going to church together, to rejoin the community from which you then sallied forth into the world. Family and church together, intrinsically intertwined as the sure foundation from which a child was raised. It reminds me of the saying that it takes a village to raise a child.

Our readings all have a theme of mothering and families of Christ.

I wonder at the story of Hannah; a woman who so desperately wanted a child that she bargained with God to allow her to become pregnant and have a child and she would then give that child for the Lord's service. True to her word she took the boy she had carried and given birth to and weaned to the temple at Shiloh where she had made that promise and handed her son Samuel over to Eli. She had great faith and great integrity. She was rewarded by having a son who would become one of the great leaders of the nation.

Our gospel reading has that heart-rending passage from John's gospel where Jesus tells his mother to treat the beloved disciple as her son, and said to the disciple, that he was from now on to treat his mother as his mother. A moment of great tenderness, of an unspoken understanding of the nature of that conversation, of Jesus' compassion for both his mother and the beloved disciple. Jesus once more showing his care and love for others, the deepest expression of compassion available to him at that time.

Our epistle from Paul's letter to the Colossians Paul reminds the followers of Christ's way in the new church in Colossae that they are to imitate Christ by clothing themselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. I always think it is worth reminding ourselves what compassion means, otherwise it seems to be a word we say with truly grasping its power. The dictionary definitions say, 'fellow-feeling, or sorrow for the sufferings of another person, showing mercy'. Literally, 'com' means to be with, and 'passion' in this context means 'feelings that hurt, cause agitation or suffering'.

Paul goes on to provide additional ways in which the followers of Christ are expected to behave and treat each other. He says we are to bear with each other and forgive one another if any has a grievance against someone. We are to forgive as the Lord forgave us. This is sound advice for any family, let alone a group of people from many different walks of life whose common link is a desire to follow the ways of Christ and learn from Him, as a disciple.

The icing on the cake is Paul's instruction to put on love, to bind believers together in unity. We and the believers in Colossae are to let the peace of Christ rule our hearts and give thanks to God. In all our actions, whether it be in speaking or in carrying out a deed, we are to do it in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Paul's instructions and descriptions are all 'mothering' acts of compassion and love. As we receive these from our community of faith, we can be equipped to go out into the world and treat all other people, who are loved by and made in the image of God, whether they acknowledge it or not, as fellow members of God's family. We are asked to follow Christ's example, to comfort others in their troubles just as we are comforted in our troubles by Christ's presence. Like mothers, we are called to help others in their times of distress.

Margaret Torrance is going to speak to us after the service about a new community initiative to help people get to GP and hospital appointments. It is an example of how we can provide a very practical 'mothering role' to people, which will make their lives easier, and at times of anxiety and distress for some, literally share their journey and also find ways to support them in conversation and sometimes in companionable silence, when words are not sufficient or not appropriate. We are not there to make people feel uncomfortable about our faith, but I do find even when people themselves have no faith, they feel supported and encouraged when I have offered to pray for them, even if that is not in their presence.

So Paul's exhortation that we clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; that we have a disposition towards forgiveness; that all that we do, we do it in love; applies not just to fellow Christians but to all people we meet.

May we all hold Christ's peace in our hearts and seek to live to the standards Paul asked of the congregation in Colossae. And I pray Margaret's initiative will find sufficient people with a heart and the time to support others in our community in their times of need. For they are all part of the family of God, and we are called to serve; to serve with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience clothed in Christ's love.