

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 199

Mothering Sunday 19th March 2023

‘Virtually Church but with some way to go...’

Welcome

Welcome to this Sunday’s Cutting Edge Camelot.

Scripture Passages

Exodus 2: 1-10

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. ² The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. ³ When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river.

⁴ His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

⁵ The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. ⁶ When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him, “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children,” she said.

⁷ Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?”

⁸ Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Yes.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. ⁹ Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed it. ¹⁰ When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, “because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.”

John 19: 25-27

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

Colossians 3: 12-17

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³ Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Reflection

Today on Mothering Sunday we celebrate the role of mothers in our lives. But can or indeed should mothers be the sole source of nurture for their children? Yes, mothers play a crucial part in children's lives but the role of the 'supporting acts' is also very important.

There is an African proverb which says that 'It takes a village to raise a child'. This means that it takes many people to provide a safe, healthy environment for children, one where children are given the security that

they need to develop and flourish and to realise their God given hopes and dreams.

Our Old Testament passage which recounts the birth of Moses does indeed remind us of the central and essential role of mothers. And yet Moses' mother finds support in this role from a number of other people.

The birth of Moses speaks of the precarious fragility of babies and the risk of suffering the immeasurable pain of the loss of a child. For the context of Moses' birth is that of a horrendous and cruel decree which has been issued by Pharaoh the ruler of Egypt. This decree is that every Hebrew boy is to be drowned by being thrown into the Nile.

In the light of this decree each of the four women in this story are presented with a stark and unenviable choice. Do they meekly comply with such a shocking order or do they disobey the decree of the authorities?

Disobedience, then as now, is a costly choice and runs the risk of reprisals being visited on them. They might even lose their own lives through such disobedience.

And yet each of these women, in their own way, do choose to disobey their political master Pharaoh. Theirs is a study in individual and collective courage and also in the power of choosing life over death. For surely mothers remind us of the essential value of life, however precarious and fragile this life might be.

And so, Moses' mother, quite naturally, refuses to let her son be drowned in the Nile. Her way of avoiding this terrible outcome is first of all to hide her son. And yet this stratagem will only work for a while. Soon Moses grows too big to be hidden. And so, in her resourcefulness Moses' mother has to think of another idea.

She finds a papyrus basket and makes it watertight with bitumen and pitch. And then she places this basket in the reeds on the bank of the Nile. This

river instead of being an agent of death as Pharoah intends becomes through the mother's ingenuity a means of preserving life.

And at this point another woman enters the story to act alongside Moses' mother in ensuring his safety. This young woman or girl is Moses' older sister. Sisters, brothers, fathers, grandparents and the whole of a family also have their own special part to play in the raising of a child.

Moses' sister first of all simply stands at a distance from her baby brother who has been placed in the basket among the reeds. This role might seem a very passive one, that of a pure observer who takes no part in what is happening around her. And yet the sister's watchfulness requires its own kind of courage. The authorities might discover her and connect her with the Hebrew baby placed among the reeds. She might be brought in for questioning and worse might follow. She too is willing to take a risk.

And anyway, as the story unfolds, the sister's role is not simply a passive one. She is watching, yes, but she is also awaiting her own turn to act. This will come in its time and when it does Moses' sister proves to be equal to the demands and opportunities of the moment.

But, first of all, another woman enters the scene. This is Pharoah's daughter who is a woman of privilege. She no doubt has a special access to her father and hopefully a special place in his heart. But this privilege does not mean that she is immune to the risks of these circumstances. She too will need to make the choice between obeying her father or choosing to preserve and nurture life.

So for all the importance of her position, she too may face consequences if what she is about to do becomes known. However, her privilege does give her a unique capacity to help and protect this helpless baby.

And there is a fourth woman who is instrumental in preserving Moses' life. This woman may be more easily overlooked than the previous three. Certainly, many of the commentators on this passage fail to notice her presence.

For Pharaoh's daughter does not come to the riverside alone. She is accompanied by her attendants who walk beside her. One of these is her maid and it is she who performs the vital role of fetching the baby Moses and bringing him to her royal mistress. Her role in this story is perhaps easy to miss. Surely, she is someone who is simply obeying orders, a person who does not act by choice but just performs a mechanical action of bringing the baby from one place to another.

At a certain level this is true but it does not account for the impact of her actions or consider the very genuine level of choice that she has or risk that she is running. For she too when she becomes aware that this is a Hebrew boy will become implicated in the defiance of Pharaoh's decree and its possible consequences. And in these circumstances, it will not be enough for her to claim that she was simply following the orders her mistress was giving to her.

Her action in fetching Moses from the reeds is another link in the chain which leads to Moses being brought successfully and unharmed to adulthood. Each link in this chain matters and if just one link is missing or broken then the chain itself will not hold. So, from that point of view there are no actors of greater or lesser significance in this drama.

The maid's part reminds us of the vital role played by those many people who serve and care for children. They may be nurses, nursery workers, nannies or teachers. And yet their impact on a child's life and the assistance that they can provide to mothers can be incalculable.

So, Moses is brought to Pharaoh's daughter and she recognises him as a Hebrew boy. The moment of choice for her has arrived. However, her first instinct is that of compassion, she takes pity on the child. And it is this compassion which provides the sure and faithful motivation for her subsequent actions. It is compassion which helps her to find a way round her father's inhumane decree.

And at this moment, Moses' sister reappears in the story. She too is a person of ingenuity and resourcefulness. She can see that Pharaoh's daughter is likely to be sympathetic and so she dares to ask her a bold question. Instead of killing the boy would Pharaoh's daughter like to find a nurse from one of the Hebrew women to bring the child up?

The offer is gratefully and swiftly taken up. Perhaps Pharaoh's daughter guesses that this might not be as straightforward an offer as it seems but she decides not to look too closely into it.

In any event, this gives the opportunity for Moses' sister to call Moses' mother and to present her as the one who will look after the child on behalf of Pharaoh's daughter to bring the child safely into adulthood. Moses' mother is even paid for doing what, as a mother, she naturally longs to do.

And meanwhile Pharaoh's daughter proves to be a reliable source of official support for the child. In the course of time when the child has grown up, he is taken to Pharaoh's daughter who now formally adopts him as her son. She underlines this status by giving him the name of Moses to recall the way in which she has drawn him out of the water. From this time forward, Moses no longer needs to remain hidden but enjoys all the rights and privileges of a member of the royal household.

So, in this account of Moses' birth and upbringing the role of his mother is quite naturally of central importance. But she cannot perform this role

successfully without the support and help of others such as Moses' sister, Pharaoh's daughter and her servant.

In our gospel reading the role of mother and child is reversed. The need for protection and help is now greater on the part of the mother than the child. Jesus has grown up and His mother is now, for those days, relatively advanced in years. Her husband Joseph is dead and the responsibility for seeing that her continuing needs are met passes to Jesus, her oldest son. And the position of a widow at that time was very precarious.

However, Jesus is on the point of death. But even in the agony of crucifixion, He still has the time and energy to think of His mother. He cannot provide for her needs personally so where will He look for help? Once again, we need to see the relationship of mother and child in a wider context.

Jesus has earlier spoken of His followers as being His brothers and sisters. And now He puts into practice this metaphor of the church as being like an extended family. He turns to His closest disciple and tells him that from now on he is to treat Mary as if she was his own mother. In fulfilment of this new relationship, this disciple will take Mary into his own home. Just as Moses was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter so too Mary finds a new source of provision and protection outside her own natural family.

For an extended family is certainly important. It can help to sustain mothers in the pressures of their role. But not everyone is in the same position in this respect. Some mothers, for instance, may have grandparents who are able to help with children and some may not. But here perhaps the idea of the church as an extended family can become the source of further support. This may be 'just' on the spiritual level of prayer or it may be expressed in more practical ways such as offers to baby sit.

Our passage from Colossians is an ideal picture of the harmonious, safe and loving community that the church is meant to be. We are to clothe ourselves with the virtues of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Forgiveness and, above all, love are to be to the fore. For it is love which binds us together and it is the strength of this shared love which provides each and every one of us with the support that we need at times of need or crisis.

So, as we celebrate the role of mothers we can also ask where they find their own support. Our passages this morning show that we cannot see the relationship of mothers and their children in isolation. This relationship forms part of the wider network of support that can be drawn on through the rest of the family, our church and community. The strength and depth of this support may vary from family to family but we always need to know where it can be found and to draw on it as and when it is needed.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- The importance of mothers and their need for support
- For those facing shortages of the essentials of life such as food or heating and those seeking to help those facing such hardship
- Resolution to various industrial disputes
- Conflict between Russia and the Ukraine and those who are refugees from this conflict
- Those whom we know who are facing illnesses of all kinds and have recently been bereaved
- For Elliscombe House in Higher Holton and its residents
- For teachers, children and parents of North Cadbury church school

Hymn

One hymn we are singing on Mothering Sunday and which reminds us of the process of growing up is 'One more step along the world I go.'

Services for this week and next

Sunday 19 th March	9.30 am Communion, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 19 th March	11.00 am Sunday Worship, North Cadbury
Sunday 19 th March	11.00 am Mothering Sunday Service, Maperton
Sunday 19 th March	4.00 pm Evensong, Yarlington
Sunday 26 th March	8.00 am Communion, Blackford
Sunday 26 th March	9.30 am Communion, South Cadbury
Sunday 26 th March	9.30 am Matins, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 26 th March	9.30 am Morning Worship, North Cheriton
Sunday 26 th March	11.00 am Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 26 th March	11.00 am Communion, Holton
Sunday 26 th March	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Yarlington
Sunday 26 th March	6.30 pm Evening Service, Galhampton

Excalibur

Excalibur is back in paper form. It contains details of Camelot people, a record of baptisms, weddings and funerals undertaken through the church in the Camelot Parishes. The March edition of Excalibur has now been published online at camelotparishes.co.uk.

The Parish Office

If Rob is not in the Office during normal office hours please contact him via email (office@camelotparishes.org.uk) or on 01749 850934.

Growing as a worshipper, a servant and a family

*We pray that 'we might live in love,
as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us'*

(Ephesians 5: 2)