

Exodus 2:1-10**John 19:25b-27**

Today we are celebrating Mothering Sunday, a day when we focus on and give thanks for our mothers. I thought it would be helpful to ask the question What makes a mother? (And don't answer a father!) on one level it is obvious - she has children. On another level it isn't obvious at all because mothering is an action, an attitude - and being a mother means having certain qualities.

Our first reading tells us about two people both of whom could be described as good mothers - if very different in the way they showed it. The first had a baby, looked after him for three months and then put him in a basket - and left him in a river! The second found a baby, had pity on him, paid somebody to look after him, and then when she could took him into her home and he became her son.

Neither of these are typical pictures of a mother as we might see it today but together they give us a clear picture of what mothering is about. Let's look at them more closely

The first one gave birth - the most obvious attribute of a mother. She became pregnant, carried him and gave birth to him; a very special, though not always easy experience; a privilege that only women have - and obviously an immensely important one. This mother was very proud of her baby. She saw he was a fine child, she loved him and so she protected him. She hid him away. She knew that his life was in danger, that if anybody knew about him he might be killed. So she kept him hidden, and as quiet as possible - those of you who are mothers will know that that was no mean f

feat! Keeping him safe and well was very important to her - and is a very large part of mothering. Protecting her child comes well above caring for herself in a mother's priorities.

She not only kept him safe she made sure he was looked after. She made a strong safe boat to put him in - and even when she put him in the river she made sure that his sister was there watching to make sure he was all right. She arranged it so that she could offer to look after him. So she was able to take him home and care for him feeding him and watching him grow. And then, when she had given him the best start in life she could she let him go which is probably one of the hardest things about being a mother. This lady had to let her child go much earlier than most mothers do because she knew that it was the only way that he could have a good life. It was impossible for her to bring him up herself - if she tried to he would be killed and because she loved him so much she let him go. She'd done all she could for him and she knew that. In the same way mothers give their children the best start they can, care for them, teach

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them and then when they have grown up let go of them so that they can live life the way they want to.

The second lady wasn't a mother at all in the physical sense. She hadn't given birth to the baby but in all other senses she was.

She had compassion for him. She took pity on him. She saw how little and helpless he was, could see that he couldn't survive on his own. She knew he needed protecting and caring for and so she responded to that

need and she did it in the way she was able to. She could see that his greatest need was to be fed. He needed milk. She couldn't feed him herself, she hadn't given birth and her body wasn't producing milk - in those days they didn't have powdered milk and bottles. So she found somebody who had milk, his own mother - and paid her to feed him. She was the best mother she could be because she made sure he got what he needed and when she couldn't provide it herself she found someone who could.

When he was old enough she took him into her home. She could have just continued paying someone to look after him but she wanted to give him a home herself. She wanted him to be part of her family so she took him into her home and gave him the love and care she needed. She gave him a name. Names are important, they give us an identity, they show us who we are. They were especially important to the Jews because their names were descriptive, they told you something about the individual. Giving Moses his name showed that his identity was important to her, she knew him and was able to give him a name that described him.

And finally he became her son. She didn't make him her son..... I think the way this is worded is very important. She couldn't make him her son - he became her son. He recognised her loving motherly care and responded to it by becoming her son.

All of these things describe what is involved in becoming a mother: giving birth, having compassion, protecting, providing, taking care, taking the child into

home/family, giving them a name/knowing who they are, letting them go and apart from the first one

they are all things that any of us can do. This isn't to deny the relationship between mother and baby which is unique and very special but nurturing, caring is something we are all equipped for - and in fact Paul's talking to the church at Thessalonica describes his care for the

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Christians there in terms of mothering and nurture. *Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, ⁸ so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.*

In Mark's gospel Jesus said that anyone who loved him and obeyed him belonged to his family and was mother, brother, or sister. As Christians that is one of the privileges we have. We belong to a wider family - God's family and we all have a part to play in it and a place within it.

One of the things I have found most special has been the extra mothers I have had. People who have loved me, cared for me, provided for me and helped me to grow up - both as a Christian and as an individual. It has also been very special for me as a single person who hasn't had children of my own to have had special relationships with children and older people who have allowed me to mother them, nurturing them and helping them to grow as individuals and as Christians.

Nurturing is a real privilege. It is a gift we all have - even if it's rusty - and it is a gift we can all share within God's family. Do you know someone who needs

nurturing that you can care for? Or do you know someone who needs to nurture - who can maybe mother you. As Jesus said "Whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" Within God's family we all have a place and a role.