

John 19.25b-27; Exodus 2.1-10; Colossians 3.12-17.

Mothering Sunday (Lent 4) 4th March 2016

8:00 a.m. & 10:00 a.m. at St. Andrew's, Totteridge

## **'The Mummy Test'**

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts always be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer (Ps.19:14).*

A young mother, Rachel, was out walking in the park with Alice, her 4 year-old daughter. Alice bent down to pick up something from the ground and started to put in her mouth. Rachel quickly asked her not to do that.

'Why Mummy?' came the inevitable reply.

'Because it's been lying around outside and is dirty and it's probably covered in germs,' said Rachel gently. At this response, Alice turned to look at her mummy and fixed her with an intense stare of admiration. 'Wow, Mummy, how do you know so much?'

'Oh,... well,' thought Rachel thinking quickly, 'all grown-ups know stuff like this. It's part of the Mummy test. You have to learn things like this or you can't be a proper mummy', she finished triumphantly.

'Oh, really,' answered Alice, as a bemused expression formed on her face. Mother & daughter walked on in silence for a couple of minutes as Alice pondered this new information.

'I get it,' Alice suddenly announced, beaming with realisation. 'If you get it wrong, then you have to be the daddy!'

Jesus often used the expression 'Father' when he referred to God. 'Fatherhood', exemplified in the figure of his own human father, Joseph, that ever-patient, tolerant, compassionate man, takes on both a divine and a very human persona in Christ. But throughout the Bible, there are repeated stories about the special nature of motherhood, from that of Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1-4) to the judgment of Solomon (1 Kings 3:16-28). Today, from Exodus, we've heard how the daughter of Pharaoh was moved by the crying of a child not her own, enough to raise Moses – for it was he – as her son (Ex.2.6).

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul emphasizes the unique nature of all humanity as Holy and Beloved, and therefore the need for us to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. These are especially the qualities required for parenthood. But it's amazing, isn't it, how as they grow, our children seem almost genetically designed and purpose-built to get under our skins.

Apart from provoking our sincerest love and devotion, they are also uniquely qualified to identify our most fundamental weaknesses, our most sensitive frailties. They can expose us for what we are like no-one else and, often to our intense annoyance, help us to learn and grow in all honesty and integrity. In other words, I want to suggest, they help us to deepen our relationship with God.

But the physical reality of new life, quite literally getting under our skin, is of course the unique preserve of motherhood, that a person comes into the world quite literally inside a woman, and a mother feels that child

growing as a part of herself. As a man, I am incapable of physical conception. As a father, I may begin to approach an understanding of parenthood, and indeed, many men are capable of a kind of ‘motherhood,’ but we can never really know what it is to grow another person as part of ourselves. More’s the pity! There are many men I can think of, throughout all of history that would have benefited from the love, compassion and wisdom learnt during the self-giving of pregnancy and child-rearing.

Mothers are therefore usually pre-disposed to empathize with their offspring, to be attuned to their cry, to feel for their needs, to know a joy in maternal love that is different to anything that men are capable of experiencing. There is scientific evidence that the relationship between mother and child is ‘symbiotic,’ mutually beneficial, and that a mother can quite automatically detect chemical imbalances and adjust the constituency of her milk in correction. Now there’s a ‘perfect harmony’ for you (Col. 3.14).

So I think that only a mother can know the full height, breadth and depth of the enormity of the loss of a child, particularly the loss of a small child, and I’m thinking now of the massacre of the innocents so soon after the birth of the Messiah (Matthew 2.16-18). And I think too of the mother of that Syrian child, Aylan Kurdi, washed up on a Turkish beach. And I think of any mother, anywhere in the world, who has outlived a child and endured the loss of a son or a daughter of any age.

And I think of Mary, the mother of God, standing with her sister, and the Magdalene; and I think of Christ on the cross, forced to witness the suffering of his family. And I think of

his great love and compassion, even at the end, asking his mother to adopt the beloved disciple as her own (v.25-7), as he adopted each of us as children of the most high, beyond any exclusion of creed, colour or caste.

And I am in awe; of God, of his love shown in Christ; of the way he made our world, of the way he leads us to continually choose between giving and taking, between selfishness and selflessness; and I’m in awe of the way he makes motherhood so vital a part of this process; and I’m in awe of those mothers who, sometimes through great adversity, rise so magnificently to the challenge.

*Spoken in the name of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit. Amen.*

## **John 19.25b-27**

<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. <sup>26</sup>When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' <sup>27</sup>Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

## **Exodus 2.1-10**

### **Birth and Youth of Moses**

2

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. <sup>2</sup>The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him for three months. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>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?' <sup>8</sup>Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Yes.' So the girl went and called the child's mother. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>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.'

## **Colossians 3.12-17.**

12 As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup>And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>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.

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