



Mothering Sunday **Rev Linda Murphy**

Year B, Lent 4

Exodus 2:1-10; John 19:25-27

10 March 2024

My earliest memory of attending church was Mothering Sunday when I was about four years old. Mother made a posey of flowers and I remember it included lavender. During the service at St Philips in St Heliers I presented her with the blessed posey.

Today is Mothering Sunday the fourth Sunday of lent our Lenten journey is nearly over. We have a very short but powerful Gospel.

History of Mothering Sunday

Most Sundays in the year churchgoers in England worship at their nearest parish or 'daughter church'.

Centuries ago, it was considered important for people to return to their home or 'mother' church once a year. So, each year in the middle of Lent, everyone would visit their 'mother' church - the main church or cathedral of the area.

Inevitably the return to the 'mother' church became an occasion for family reunions when children who were working away, returned home. (It was quite common in those days for children to leave home for work once they were ten years old.)

And most historians think that it was the return to the 'Mother' church which led to the tradition of children, particularly those working as domestic servants, or as

apprentices, being given the day off to visit their mother and family.

As they walked along the country lanes, children would pick wildflowers or violets to take to church or give to their mother as a small gift.

The food item specially associated with Mothering Sunday is the simnel cake, sorry I haven't managed to make one for morning tea.

“He’s not the Messiah he is just a naughty boy”. These words from “The Life of Brian” seem very inappropriate for this Gospel however they come to mind. Being a mother of two sons I am only too aware of the challenges of being a mother. There is often joy and pleasure but there is an enormous amount of angst. Poor Mary has had a difficult life from the moment she has known she is with child. Jesus’ birth in a manger, followed by Herod’s attempt to take his life. Their flight to Egypt then return to Nazareth. Bringing up Jesus was challenging; he went missing in the temple and the story continues to the finality of our two-verse gospel today.

None of the other gospels have this story. By the time it happens, Jesus has been flogged, had a crown of thorns put on his head, been mocked, struck on the face, stripped of his clothes, and nailed to the cross. He is at a point of maximum humiliation and pain.

His mother is never named by John and in both her appearances in his Gospel- here at the end of his ministry and at the very beginning of his ministry (when he turns water into wine at a wedding in Cana)- she is simply called ‘woman’. The beloved disciple, who is also never named, appears at critical moments - reclining next to Jesus at the last supper and here at the crucifixion.

Perhaps, omitting names, let’s all of us identify with both of them. That would fit with one reading of this passage: that this points to the essence of Christian community. It springs

from Jesus laying down his life for his friends. It is directly related to Jesus in mutual love. Jesus brings together diverse people, men, and women, younger and older, blood relatives and others. Jesus shares his identity and his love to the uttermost with this community. New relationships are created. The disciple becomes the brother of Jesus, or even substitutes for him – “Here is your son”; and the woman has her role and household transformed – “Here is your mother”. They respond to his call to share life together.

This might be seen as the hidden church of ordinary living and loving that “abides until I come”, which is at the heart of the more public church associated with Peter’s leadership and martyrdom. “And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home”: **in this Gospel Jesus’ ‘hour’ is the climactic moment.** The time of his death when he loved “his own... to the end” His mother and beloved disciple are utterly “his own”, and as he dies in order to “draw all people to myself” this family-transcending family is thrown open to all.

Over the last few weeks, we have had whanau pass away most with whanau but others with no connection at all. It is so sad that by chance you find whanau after our whanau have passed and it gets complicated. On Thursday I sat with a Tane who I had worked with for many years while he passed. He had reconnected to his whanau however they were in **Napier so couldn’t be with him** but had visited him in recent weeks. We had two others also at Auckland City Hospital with whanau that is such a relief.

Homeground and our other residential sites offer a community of connection that whanau have not previously had. Support workers actively reconnect whanau to their cultural connections when they are in the right space. This takes time and courage and on occasion reconnection is not made nevertheless they are now in a community of caring, empathy and hope.

In Homeground, people who have been disappointments to their families, have none of the marks of success in our society (wealth, power, beauty, health, education, fame) and have been humiliated in many ways, become the centre of a community of respect, celebration, and love.' Perhaps the deepest secret of any really good family, group, community or society is that the 'little ones' are made central, and they and all the rest use their gifts to create a community like that.

We are developing rituals such as our Wahine Kai on Tuesday evening, shared lunch on level 9 each Tuesday, Waiata on Wednesday. My dream is to see Haeata used every afternoon to connect community especially older people isolated in all our city apartments with Homeground.

On this Mothering Sunday remember our mothers and those who cared and care for us and remember Mary a mother who loved and was loved by Jesus.