

Sermon at the Cathedral Eucharist

Mothering Sunday

readings: [Exodus 2.1-10](#), [Colossians 3.12-17](#), [John 19.25b-27](#)

10 March 2024

Forming a new family

Let me start with something gruesome. Dying on a cross is excruciating but it isn't the pain that kills you. It is most likely to be asphyxia, basically humans cannot breathe in that position. And when you are being slowly asphyxiated, speaking is quite difficult. And yet, in his agony, Jesus chooses to spend his last few breaths... on forming an adoptive family.

I think that there are 2 reasons for this. The first is that he saw them! Truly saw them. He looked down and saw two of the people he loves the most in the world and decides they would provide comfort to each other in their time of sorrow. He wanted to love them back as they loved him and encouraged his ministry throughout his life.

The importance of Mary's love for Jesus' ministry

And at that moment the love they lavished on him throughout his life really mattered. We can't underestimate how important, particularly Mary's love, was in the development of Jesus' ministry. She was directly involved in Jesus ministry at crucial points:

Conception – Mary's obedience was paramount to everything else!

At the temple when he was 12 – she told him off – gave him boundaries and delayed his ministry to an appropriate time.

Wedding at Cana. Jesus insists it is not his time, but his mother knows better, as mothers often do. Because of her insistence, Jesus starts doing what he came to do. Notice that it is because of her encouragement, that Jesus realizes the time really had come. Because of her love, Jesus can do what he was sent to do.

I believe that Mary's motherly love for Jesus, makes it possible for Jesus to show his love at other times — like washing the feet of his disciples, including the one who would betray him or asking for forgiveness for those who crucify him. It is no exaggeration to say that Mary loved Jesus into his future and the fulfilment of his mission.

At the cross, she needed encouragement to believe she could somehow carry on and he provides it. So often we cannot do what we need to do, have to do, even want to do, without another saying, "yes, you can do this;" without another loving us into our future. Jesus is loved into his future by Mary and she is loved into hers by him.

Can you see a developing pattern – one person loving another into their true self, who they are meant to be?

The importance of choosing to be family

Which, on the Mothering Sunday brings me to what it means to love one another in a family context. Jesus grew up with Mary, his birth mum and Joseph his adoptive dad. But at the cross, Jesus forms a new family. Not born of blood links but simply out of love and commitment. Does this new adoptive family feel less "real" to you? Hopefully not.

There are so many ways to create a family. Scripture gives us ample examples of blended or alternative families - our OT reading of Moses' birth and adoption story and the gospel reading today being just two examples. And that's a great thing to remember on this Mothering Sunday where we remember the place of the Mother Church in our lives.

The church family

Which leads me to the Church and more specifically, to us here at the Cathedral. Now take a moment to look around you. If we were in a more evangelical context, this congregation would be called your church family. And I really like that term – because congregations or church families – behave in many ways like all other families – there's plenty of support and love and hurts and drama! How are we doing as a church family?

- How accepted or seen do you feel here?
- How healthy a family do you reckon we are at the moment?
- How do we behave towards one another, explicitly or implicitly?
- Does what you look like, what you wear, when or how often you come to church, how old or young you are, whether you have visible or hidden disabilities affect how valued you feel?
- How can we, affirm that we don't all need to look the same or behave the same to belong to one another?

Most important question of today: Do you believe that we belong to one another?

Because we can belong to one another.

When Jesus says to John: "here is your mother", and to Mary: "here is your son", I believe he is saying to us – "go and do likewise".

But belonging to a family is ultimately a choice. We can choose to claim deep kinship with people who are not our flesh and blood, or not. It is a calling: both a joy and painstaking hard work, which Jesus lays out for the future of his family in his last hours.

You are here, so I'm going to assume you have chosen to be part of this family or are thinking about joining it. If this has never been said to you out loud: Welcome! We're so glad you're here (both physically and online).

How can we love you into your future? How can you love someone else here into theirs? Not sure what I mean, well...

- Is there someone struggling with grief – sit with them.
- Is there a child bursting with enthusiasm – don't be offended, join in the play.
- We will be having a Prayer day in April – offer to come and pray with others, it'll be so great to see us praying for one another and those who walk through our doors.
- Is there a brother or sister who you have never talked to – get to know them. Ask their name at coffee, or actually why not stay for coffee after the service today, if you don't normally do that?
- Do you know who prepared your posy of flowers today? No? Go and find out and thank them. They may be mortified but being truly seen is good for the soul.

Mothering Sunday is a reminder that we can be family to those who are not of us, out of mutual love for Jesus. Others may be puzzled when we claim to belong together, but we know that we are kin.

So take the time to look around today. Here is your mother and father and brother and sister. Here is home.

Amen.

**The Revd Carla Vicêncio Prior,
Canon for Community Learning.**