

Luke 2:33-35 Sermon for 8am – Mother's Day

Mothering Sunday is always a privilege to be part of. We all have mothers and it is good to spend the day reflecting on how grateful we are to them. The day can be tinged with sadness if our mothers are no longer with us, and for a few it can be a difficult day if our relationship with our mother was not what we had wanted, but for all of us it is a chance to think about how we can help be a mothering figure to those around us, and a chance for us to give thanks for those who mother us, whether that is biologically or otherwise.

Today's reading is short, and is part of Jesus being presented at the temple as a baby. Simeon has just prophesied about the amazing things that Jesus will do, bringing light to the whole world, and then we have this reading where there is a more sombre tone to his prophesy. Jesus will be a man who will cause great change and will be opposed whilst bringing to the surface the thoughts and motivations of those in power.

It's a tough prophecy, but I want to consider it from Mary's angle this morning. How must it have felt to hear these words and the prediction that her own soul will be wounded by these events? As a mother, the excitement and pride must have been electric on hearing how her son would bring light to the nations. He was to be a great man. It must have taken her back to the days when the angel Gabriel met her to arrange Jesus's conception. She was God's servant then and now her child would be great and bring about huge changes to the world. She must have been proud, delighted.

But then our reading today. Who would want to hear that their first-born baby, promised by God and miraculously conceived, would be opposed. Mothers spend their whole lives worrying about their children and getting upset when life isn't treating them well. What must it have been like to hear that Jesus would have major opposition? And what about the language of violence – the rising and falling and the sword piercing her soul? What a shiver down her spine that must have created. What a physical, shuddering sickness must have passed through her in a wave of shock as she stood appalled at the prophecy about the little bundle of flesh that she had delivered so recently.

And how it must have stuck with her as she took Jesus home. As she fed him, weaned him, and watched him grow. All Mothers have moments of loss as their little ones grow up, but for Mary this must have grieved her more than most – watching her son's inevitable march towards his destiny, even as she was proud to watch his first steps, his first words and his first mouthful of food. What a life it must have been for Mary, and then what pain she must have felt at seeing the events unfold as they did – hoping the prophet was wrong, but knowing deep down that he wasn't. And with each passing year, feeling the grip of destiny tighten around her little one.

What a life. What a mother. But for us, what an example of motherhood. As we all act as mothers, grandmothers and even just maternal figures to those around us – and that doesn't just mean the women – we can all learn from Mary. Mary saw her love being dashed to pieces, slowly, knowing it was coming, dreading it with each passing year – and yet she knew her obedience to God was tied up in her motherhood. In her mothering of Jesus, she gave her perfect service to God. When it made her laugh, when it made her cry, when it made her heart explode with pride and joy and when it made her heart break in despair – Mary served God in being the mother who Jesus needed, and in loving him even when that was hard, confusing or dangerous.

Praise God for those who mother us today or mothered us in the past. We ask God to help us to mother others as Mary mothered his own son. We ask God to help us to serve him in whatever capacity he has given us, even when it hurts, and even when it's hard. Amen.