

## Readings for the Fourth Sunday in Lent – Mothering Sunday

15<sup>th</sup> March 2026

### First Reading: Exodus 2:1-10

A man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him for three months. 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. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

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. 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. 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?' Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Yes.' So the girl went and called the child's mother. 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. 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.'

### Second Reading: Colossians 3:12-17

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

### Gospel: St John 19:25b-27

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

### **A Reflection for Mothering Sunday**

Today we celebrate Mothering Sunday. Mothering Sunday not Mother's Day, for they are not the same thing. The secular celebration of Mothers' Day and all things 'Mum' does, of course, have great value in many families, but also causes great pain for others, as I hope we are all aware. I notice that many organisations are finally latching on to

this – emails now give me the choice to opt out of their Mother’s Day advertising. Mothering Sunday, on the other hand, celebrates mothering - the caring for, protection and nurture of others by all of us that should characterise our church communities - and is an opportunity to give thanks for the love and care we receive from God and from those around us, not just mothers.

We see that in our Old Testament and Gospel readings today. On the face of it, they tell the stories of two mothers and Sons. However, if we look more closely, we see that these are not simply accounts of good mothers or idealised accounts of parent-child relationships, but stories that illustrate a range of caring, of mothering, relationships. They are stories that show the complexity of relationships that we still encounter today.

The story of the birth of Moses is that of a child born in a time of great danger – a Hebrew boy who, if discovered, was most likely to be killed. His biological mother fed, cared for and hid her child, but recognised that, in order to save his life, she had to suffer the grief of separation by giving him up ... and she did so twice. Moses was further cared for and protected by his sister who kept watch over her hidden baby brother, and whose quick thinking enabled him to be returned to his mother at least for a period of time. And Moses was also cared for by the Egyptian princess, Pharaoh’s daughter, initially through her compassion for the vulnerable infant, even though she recognised his origins and therefore what ought to happen, and later by adopting him as her son, raising and educating him.

We should also remember that adoption was also a characteristic of Jesus’ own childhood: Joseph was Jesus’ adoptive father who raised him as his own son. But today’s Gospel passage illustrates others of Jesus’ close relationships. At the foot of the Cross are his mother and one of his closest friends, in despair as they watch him suffer and die. Yet his concern is for them – he loves and cares for them in the midst of his own suffering, by giving them to one another. In doing so, he establishes a new relationship of mutual love and care, one that we could perhaps also call adoptive, a parent-child relationship without blood ties.

We know from our own lives the variety and complexity of human relationships. We know that our relationships need working at to sustain them. We know, too, how difficult it can sometimes be to understand others whose life experiences and relationships have been vastly different from our own. And we know that sometimes, even with the best will in the world, relationships break down. Above all, we know that the best relationships are those characterised by mutual love and care for one another, by mothering, whether there is a blood tie or not.

In today’s passage from Colossians, Paul describes some of the characteristics of good relationships. He speaks of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Compassion and mercy can be when others are suffering, or in material need, but also when they mess up or simply struggle with the reality of day-to-day life. Kindness, so important in all relationships, is accepting one another as we are, helping one another out when we do face struggles, being generous with our time and resources to assist where others have need. Humility is to recognise that we all have our good and bad days, to not put ourselves above others but to prioritise their wellbeing and to be willing to accept their help and support in turn. Meekness, or perhaps gentleness, is not weakness, but is about our attitude when dealing with others; the willingness to say or do what needs to be said or done but also being willing to listen and to compromise. And patience is that which sustains relationships in the face of adversity and difference.

And, with all of these, Paul instructs us to bear with one another and forgive one another. There is an understanding here of that complexity of human relationships, a recognition that we live in community with one another and that

we need to do so with mutual tolerance, that we are all bound to annoy each other, get things wrong or disagree at times.

Our relationships can be wonderful and they can be difficult, but this passage from Colossians also reminds us that our human relationships are rooted in our relationship with God. The characteristics of good relationships are Christ-like qualities, which we, as Christ's followers, endeavour to imitate, qualities that are bound together in love – they all flow from loving God and one another. Similarly, we are to let the peace of Christ rule our hearts, to let these Christ-like qualities guide us and enable us to dwell in harmony with each other, in a way which was so different to the prevailing way of the Roman Empire at the time Paul was writing, and which also seems so different to much of what happens in the world today.

Mothering Sunday is a day to celebrate the best of our human relationships, whatever their nature; to remember and give thanks for those who have and do care for us, and those we care for. But it is not just those we know. As David reminded us last week, we are also called to recognise and love the stranger, not just human beings but all of creation, and to recognise the face of Christ in the stranger.

It may strike us as odd that the celebration of Mothering Sunday is in the middle of Lent until we remember that Lent is a season in which to deepen our relationship with God, and to work on developing those Christ-like qualities that make for good relationships both with God and one another. I'd like to finish with a poem that I came across recently that makes this connection between our Lenten journey and our relationships with one another and the world. It is by Liz Crumlish, priest-in-charge at St Oswald's Maybole in the diocese of Glasgow and Galloway, and used with permission.

'The journey into the wilderness is not about finding ourselves  
or even seeking the meaning of life.

It is about opening our eyes to the world around us  
to see the need of our neighbour and of our planet.

Our Lenten journey misses the mark when  
we retreat into piety and shelter in the Spirit  
instead of stepping out tentatively or boldly  
on the path that God treads.

Feeding the hungry, welcoming the homeless  
speaking up for the oppressed  
freeing those imprisoned  
by hopelessness and depression.

Those are the tasks  
that make our Lenten journey worthwhile.

Going into those wilderness spaces  
that folk endure every day  
and seeing the footprints of Christ,

who has travelled this way before us  
and who shows us how to journey,  
caring for one another  
sharing love and compassion  
making a difference along the way.  
That is what Lent requires.