

27th March 2022

Mothering Sunday is thought to originate from the days of domestic service when it may have been a day off for the indentured to return to their home parish.

Interestingly if you look up a definition of 'indenture' one word jumps off the page – BIND. Of course, there are good bindings and bad bindings. In our gospel reading Jesus asks Mary and his beloved disciple to bind to each other as mother to son, and I like to imagine that in that binding, over the years, there was a mending of the memories of that dark day.

Love also binds together two families in our reading from Exodus. An Egyptian Princess chooses to rescue, and love, a Hebrew baby boy....love that crosses boundaries is perhaps the most beautiful to see, and in Exodus as elsewhere love that crosses boundaries has deep rooted effects. Never forget that eventually that much loved baby in a basket becomes the one to lead others out of indentured slavery and into freedom.

Think of our contemporary Lord Alf Dubs who came to freedom here in the UK because of the Kindertransport and now advocates ceaselessly for safe passage for unaccompanied minors.

Hymn writers like to bind with their songs; in 'Bind us Together Lord' we sing of our desire to be bound together in love, then of course there is 'St Patrick's Breastplate' a prayer turned hymn 'I Bind unto Myself Today'

Binding the strong name of the Trinity, Christ behind me, Christ beside me, and so on... these bindings of love and loyalty within the Trinity are a world away from economic bondage of domestic servants who, 150 years ago may have trudged down the lane to this little church.

BUT the fact that love **can** bind and heal does not mean an instant, magic salve to all our hurts – it means that we have the capacity to mend if we can do so through love, and Jesus' resurrection after that foot of the cross desperation shows us the path forward from suffering. At the foot of the cross neither John nor Mary can mend the broken body of Jesus, their first shared act is to witness the suffering of the one they love.

It is theologically sound to consider in John's gospel 'the beloved disciple' as representative of all who turn to follow Christ in which light we can place ourselves at the foot of the cross, called to love and to stand beside the vulnerable (in 1st century Israel the widow and the orphan are archetypes of vulnerability).

They – the vulnerable, the most needy are to be our family, the one's at the foot of the cross as well as the crucified.

This dreadful moment at the foot of the cross.

This life affirming rescue of a basket from the river, widens out wonderfully our rather neat western nuclear family stereotype and takes us to a wider more generous place - a place voiced and offered even as we speak, by so many watching the war in Ukraine unfold.

This deep human instinct to love and to nurture is represented for us Christ's broken body on the cross, a body which mends into an eternal body lived out now by you and me.

This deep human instinct needs to be nurtured and allowed to flourish, our desire to mend and make good can be lived out in so many ways, in our care for creation, in our care for the other, in our attention to each other and to God.

In a moment we will take some time to sew and mend, using the colours of the Ukrainian flag we can sit and contemplate those who have mended in our lives and those who work to mend our broken world.

In our reading from John, Mary and the beloved have yet to see the risen Lord, at this point their hope is in each other and we are invited to imagine them moving forward together, walking away in their shared grief. Later, with resurrection there will be late night conversations, moments by the lakeside, a few appearances, shared meals, mending, and a final Ascension, all these things are to be absorbed into the lives of those who followed Jesus and into our lives today.

In community we can heal best, it will be community that will sustain the mothers of the Russian soldiers, it will be community that will hold the people of Ukraine together even as they will also experience and witness loss and deep trauma. There are many ways in which, in the years after trauma people are helped to mend and heal, they will need angels in their lives who may be found in the very real work of medics, counsellors, house builders, faith communities, social workers and many more.

In our own lives we will have been in those mending places, we may be in them now...as menders or mended or mending..

On this Mothering Sunday, I invite you to recollect those who have stood beside you in difficult times, those who have witnessed with you the shadow times in your life and those who have helped you to mend.

Who may have helped you pick up the threads of your life when you hit rock bottom?

Mending is coming back into fashion, as we realise how damaging our throw away society is we are rediscovering what it is to make do and mend in practical ways, here in gathered in worship we can share times together that can be healing and mending, can voice our sadness and our joy, and sense the power of being still together as a new kind of family that binds with gentleness and mends with love.

Amen.