

Mothering Sunday – 15th March 2026

1 Samuel 1: 20-end

Today is Mothering Sunday - but it's so easy to forget that some face today with an ache that is rarely spoken about.

It reminds them of loss and missed opportunities – many of us, including myself, have lost a child and today brings that back into sharp focus, today also reminds me that this year marks 20 years since my own beloved mother died.

Others might be estranged from their parents, or have been adopted and never known their origins, or they might have never had the opportunity to become a parent themselves – there are so many reasons why today has to be approached with such sensitivity.

And today doesn't exclude men - as nurturing love is not just confined to the female gender – God himself is the creator God – and all humans are made in his likeness and therefore contain mothering qualities. We are all called to reflect God's heart and show mercy and compassion, protect the vulnerable, show dignity to the forgotten and uphold what is good, true and beautiful whilst at all times extending grace to those around us.

Now, a very quick look at the history of today. The celebration of Mothering Sunday dates to the 16th Century – it was the day when Christians were meant to return to their mother church, the church in which they had been baptized and where they had officially become a child of the church. Those who did this were referred to as having “gone mothering”. In more recent times those in service were given this day off by their masters to return to their families and their local churches.

Today provides an opportunity for us each to reflect on the Mothering nature of this our church providing us with a safe place where we all belong and can grow spiritually.

In the bible there are many remarkable mothers – Eve, the mother of all; blessed Mary; and in today's reading we heard the inspiring story of Hannah.

But let's back the story up a little bit to the beginning of chapter 1 as it gives us more insight into Hannah's life.

She was the first wife of Elkanah, but they'd not been blessed with children and, as was normal and the custom at the time, he had taken a second wife Peninnah in order to secure his line. Peninnah bore him children.

We do know that Elkanah favoured Hannah and recognised her pain in being childless, as it's recorded that he gave her double portions of meat, but Peninnah constantly taunted and humiliated her about her inability to bear children. At that time being barren was considered a curse.

Each year the whole family made the pilgrimage to the temple to make their offerings and pray, Peninnah continued to taunt Hannah about her childlessness.

In the temple, Hannah poured out her heart to God earnestly. She prayed "Lord almighty if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

As she did this, tears were running down her face and her lips were moving. Eli the priest saw her and assumed she must be drunk, he reproached her. But she respectfully corrected him and explained she was pouring out her soul to the Lord. Eli was so moved by her genuine sincerity – that he blessed her saying "go in peace, may the God of Israel grant your petition that you have asked of him".

Soon after this her prayers were answered, she became pregnant and Samuel was born.

She honoured her promise to God and only kept Samuel with her until he was weaned, then she took him to the temple and handed him over into Eli's care.

I cannot even begin to imagine how hard that must have been. To hand over your most longed for child.

She would not have known at that time that God would honour her sacrifice so abundantly, blessing her with many more children (she had 3 more sons and 2 daughters) and appointing Samuel as one of the greatest prophets of his time. He became a prophet, a priest, and a kingmaker – anointing both Saul and David as Kings of Israel.

She continued to be devoted to her firstborn as v19 of chapter 2 tells us - each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice.

There are several things we can take away from this story.

Firstly, Peninnah's actions remind us how hurtful words can be – and challenges us to act with kindness and compassion at all times.

Hannah demonstrates the importance of having an honest and intimate relationship with God. She poured out her heart in total honesty and vulnerability. It is so easy for us to forget that he knows all our thoughts, our fears and our pain and wants us to be honest with him. He loves us unconditionally and wants us in turn to be unconditionally open with him and allow him to transform us from the inside out.

When we face challenges, work pressure, family issues, financial struggles, health problems – we should lay all our sorrows out before the Lord.

Like Hannah we should also remember to thank God when our prayers are answered with gratitude through worship. Chapter 2 details Hannah's prayer of thanks written in poetic form which is interestingly known as the Magnificat just like Mary's prayer in Luke 1 – the content and setting of both are similar: God intervenes by giving a son and the son grows up to deliver God's people.

Hannah also reminds us that when we make a promise to God – we must keep it.

Sometimes like Hannah we have to wait, but God's plans and timings are always perfect – we have to maintain patience, faith and trust. His plans are far greater than we can ever imagine.

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