

Mothering Sunday 2020

For this year's Mothering Sunday here are two short homilies written by Carol and Gilly based on two mums from the Bible.

Carol Elsasser has written on Elizabeth and John.

I'm going to introduce you to Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist and cousin of Mary, mother of Jesus.

She was selected by God to be the mother of the great prophet who would prepare the way for Jesus.

Elizabeth was the wife of the priest Zechariah, who was a member of the Levite tribe and she herself was descended from Aaron. So both John's chosen parents were righteous and blameless – familiar with the scriptures and living Godly lives. Both ideally suited to bring up John to fulfil his prophesised ministry and to teach him the scriptures and prophecies that related to him and his purpose.

But it wasn't a straightforward start.

Elizabeth wasn't just old – she is described as “very old” and “well on in years”.

Also at that time, being childless would have been a source of great shame, disgrace and reproach in her society. Her "failure" to provide her husband with a son to carry on the family name could even be cause for divorce. But Elizabeth remained faithful to God. She knew that God remembers those who are loyal to him.

Elizabeth was also a strong woman, her husband had been struck dumb when he disbelieved the Angel Gabriel's news that Elizabeth would bear a son who they should call John (which in Hebrew means God is Gracious). So when the time came to name the baby

– on the eighth day at his circumcision - it would have been assumed that the baby would be named after his father in the normal way. As Zechariah couldn't speak Elizabeth would have had to have courage, speak up, stand firm and obey God – in a ceremony when women's voices would not normally have been heard.

She knew what God had entrusted her to do.

What can we take from Elizabeth's story? We too should believe God is going to do what he says he will do - even if it seems impossible. We should trust God with the circumstances and timings of our life. He keeps his promises.

As parents we should have the same desire as Elizabeth to teach and inspire our children – or as Gilly will be saying – to teach all the children within our Church family - in the ways of God and pray for God's hand upon their lives and futures.

On researching Elizabeth, I have also been struck too by how merciful our God is – both Elizabeth and Zechariah were elderly when John was born so I think it is very likely that they didn't live long enough to see their son beheaded by Herod. God spared them that. God is a merciful God.

Thank you Lord that you are a God true to your promises and both faithful and merciful. Amen.

The God of the impossible...which describes bringing up children nicely. John was a Nazarite with the perfect parents to guide him in that way. Hearing (reading) Carol I experience Elizabeth's joy and notice her husbands lack of faith!

Gilly Robinson has written on Hannah and Samuel

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I am talking about Hannah. Samuels mum.
Their story can be found in the books of Samuel.

Hannah's life was made a misery by the other wife because she didn't have children.

Peninnah, the other wife, taunted Hannah so much that she wept and couldn't eat.

So Hannah went to the temple to pray and plead with God. She was so upset that Eli the priest, thought she was drunk.

'I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.' 1Samuel 1 v15,16.

Eli blessed the prayer and she went on her way with a sense of hope. God does hear our prayers. Sometimes it takes a while to see the evidence. This was certainly the case, as it says in verse 20 (1Sam 1)'.so in the course of time'. she had Samuel.
God had the last word. She'd suffered the taunts yet her son becomes one of Israel's greatest prophets, serving the people for 40yrs and anointing Kings.

She, had, however, in her anguished prayer, promised to give her child to the Lord. Her gift from God.

She nursed him, loved and cared for him and then at about the age of 3, she took him back to Eli at the temple.

'As surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood beside you praying to the LORD. I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give

him to the LORD. For his whole life he shall be given to the LORD.' v25-28 1Sam1

It's hard to imagine how that must have felt.

To leave a toddler with a Temple Priest.

But she had promised. She never forgot her longed for son. She returned each year to visit and bring him a new robe that she made. She also was blessed with 5 more children!

I have always felt my children were a gift from God. A blessing. Loaned to me for a period of time.
And now when they leave from a visit home, I still feel it keenly.

On this mothering Sunday we think about Mother Church. And it brought to mind the African Proverb, 'It takes a village to raise a child'.

Or a Church! That's all of us. Praying for our children, our own church children, the school children. All of them. Wherever they are, whatever they are doing. Not despairing but keeping hopeful and praying.

Thank you. All of you for your prayers and support for my children. For all the children.
Being a mother is a joy and privilege. But we all help in the mothering. Of the children and of each other.

Amen!! A glimpse into the lives of two bible mums. I could have chosen others because there is a recurring theme in the bible, childless mums crying out to God and being heard. (Sarah and Rachel come to mind).

Joy, pain, hope, fears, pride, loss. All these are our mothers experiences and they are the churches experience too. To be a Mothering church is to long for children, raise them in the ways of the faith but then trust them to God for the ways they go.

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God grant us the gift of children.

This Sunday though is also a poignant and for some a hard day. There are those for whom Mum has passed away and those whose relationship with Mum was not good and those who didn't have children

This is where we realise that although we are invited to call God our heavenly father, he is far more than we could imagine and is father, mother, brother, friend, saviour, comforter and so much more. To him we bring our children asking his blessing. To Him we come with our loss, sadness our gratitude and joy.

And if Mrs Hutchinson (senior) was here and this was a real live service, she would tell of how the Lord has held her children, three of us that live and the little one that didn't, in his loving arms.

Lord God, we thank you for your church through which we discover the love of God. We thank you for our birth into faith and the nurturing we have received. We thank you for Mothers and the love and care they have shown to us.

We ask for your comfort for those whose Mums have passed away. We bring to you those whose emotions are conflicted because relationships were less than they could have been.

We thank you for those Fathers who had to also be mothers. We recognise many families are not the usual neat and tidy package.

We thank you that your love is more complete than mother and father rolled into one

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.