

John 19:25-27 – Sermon for 8am

It's Mother's Day, and on this day we are used to Old Testament readings about Samuel and his mother, or about mothering in general, so today's gospel reading caught my eye. Here we have Jesus, dying, hanging on a cross, but still concerned about his own mother's well-being and future.

It's an odd reading for a Mothering Sunday since it's really about a son caring for his mother rather than a mother caring for her children. An odd reading for Mother's day.

For me, as I was thinking about it, this reading seems really appropriate however. Mary stands at the foot of the cross and watches her son dying in front of her eyes. It must have been agonising for her. It's hard to imagine what having to watch that would do to a person. To say she must have been distressed is an understatement – my guess is that she ranged from silent horror at what was happening and her powerlessness to stop it, to cries of anguish and impotent attempts to sooth her first-born son. She dared not watch but couldn't look away.

And Jesus, in his own agony, in the darkness and horror of being powerless, abandoned, and waiting for death's jaws to clench around him reaches out beyond himself to his mother. He reaches out to ensure that she is not alone when he is gone, to ensure that someone is there for her in the pain that her grief will produce, and also very practically, to ensure his mother is cared for in her old age.

All this is relevant for us on Mother's Day. Some of us may have parents who increasingly need help and support as they grow frail, and this isn't an easy task. It is costly in so many ways. When Jesus passed on the responsibility for caring for Mary to his close friend, John, it wasn't an easy thing. But John took up the mantle, not because it was easy, but because it involved love for his friend, and love for Mary, his newly adopted mother. When we feel like we have reached the end of our energy in caring for those we love, perhaps it would help to remember that we care for our family, because Jesus cares for family. And each act of care and love is an act of care and love in service of Jesus, the one who says, "Here is your mother, your brother, your son, your father, your daughter." We are like John, standing at the foot of the cross, serving Jesus in the care and love we provide for the family Jesus has given us.

However, for some of us, the role is reversed and we are all too aware that we are the ones who need care and love from others as we perhaps get older, or struggle with circumstances. In some ways, it's easier to put ourselves in John's position as the one taking on responsibility to care for someone than it is to be Mary, the one being placed into John's household to be cared for. We feel guilty about being a bind, or we feel frustrated about our reduced independence. It is hard to accept that we need to rely on someone else. It feels like this is a loss of dignity or freedom, or that this isn't the picture of who we are or who we wanted to be. Perhaps we have been taken into someone else's home, and it wasn't our decision, or we fear that this might one day happen to us.

I think that all of us have these fears, even if they aren't a reality yet. I don't have time to deal with them fully, but there are two things in this reading which might be helpful to take away and think about. One is that Jesus didn't just ask John to look after his mother – instead Jesus gave his mother a new son. Mary was to be a mother to John, just as John was to be a son to Mary. Mary continued to have a role beyond simply being cared for. She was to be a mother figure to Jesus' best friend. When you think about it like that, none of us should ever feel that we've nothing to offer any more and we are finished with life. We are still prayers, we are still able to love, even if we are frail or

even if our minds aren't what they once were. We are able to be the mother and father figures that those who care for us need.

The second thing is that Mary accepted this new status with humility and grace. I think this is really hard. It's difficult to accept that we now require care, that we can't do things for ourselves. But Mary accepted this and through it allowed John to serve her and to serve Jesus, his master and his God. If we cannot accept care, then we stop others serving God by caring. In some ways, perhaps this humility and grace in letting others love us through acts of practical help models Jesus in a special way. He was dying, but yet humble enough to ask his friend to care for him by looking after his mother. This wasn't a small thing to ask, but Jesus was humble enough to ask for it. The grace to allow someone else to serve us and to serve the ones we love is a mirror of the grace of Jesus himself. By allowing others to serve us, we display Godly humility and love in a special way.

I'm painfully aware that I've only scratched the surface of these issues, but hopefully I've given you food for thought. When we love and care for those around us, we serve Jesus and show God's love to others. But also when we are humble enough to be cared for we also demonstrated God's own grace and love to those who love us. I pray that we all become beacons of this humility and grace when the time comes. Amen.