

**Mother's Day May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023.**

**Scripture:** John 2:1–11

and John 19:25–27



As we lead into the sermon, I want to acknowledge that

Mother's Day often results in a variety of emotions. Some are joyful and happy, others painful and sad. Some stir up hard memories such as regret, disappointment, and guilt. Others remember happy times and, if our mums are no longer with us, anticipation at meeting them again when the Lord returns. I encourage you to be gentle with yourself, maybe do a bit of pampering. And as the family that we all are, support and care for each other.

We have heard two readings about Mary, the mother of our Lord. We read about Mary when she was first chosen by God to bear His Son and the birth in Nazareth. Think of the miracle of newness. One of the common experiences when a newborn baby is placed in the arms of its parents, is that of wonder and awe and gratitude.

This is something we could not have made on our own. And that feeling is right. Every child is a gift from God. Every child has needed the spark of God to make the cells and DNA of two people become a new human being with their own thoughts and ways of engaging with the world. In Mary's case, it was a combination of her DNA with the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit.

We hear about Mary when she brought Jesus to the temple as a baby just 8 days old. We are told Mary kept what Simeon and Anna said about Jesus in her heart.

I wonder what Mary may have said when Jesus was 12 and stayed behind in Jerusalem. I recall when I had done something wrong as a child, mum would say: “wait till your father comes home.” Would Mary have said: “Wait till Joseph comes along.”

Jesus then submitted and obeyed His parents, but we don’t know anything of His upbringing. I can imagine though; He would have had to be disciplined from time to time. I wonder if He heard His parents say: “this is going to hurt me more than it hurts you.” Or perhaps if Jesus came into the house and left the door open. Would Mary say: “Were you born in a tent?” Of course, Jesus could have said, not a tent a barn!

Mothering has progressively changed over the years, but there are still many stereotypes in existence, which continue to place pressure on mothers and fathers. These can leave a parent feeling guilty because maybe the way they are raising or have raised their children doesn’t fit into the norms. Let’s explore a bit about Mary as a mother.

**The Miracle at Cana:** When you read this scripture about the first miracle at the wedding in Cana, it may raise a smile because Mary told Jesus to do something, and obviously, in front of the guests. This is the only commandment we hear from Mary in the Bible, and these are the last words of Mary that are recorded in the

Gospels. Consider her words though which reveal her faith in Jesus, not just as her Son, but as Her Lord.

She said to the servants – whatever He tells you to do, do it. Mary had no idea what Jesus might do, as He had not performed a single recorded miracle up to that time. But her faith was so deep, she said to the servants, without reservation, no matter what He commands, no matter what is coming up, if it is His will, it will be right and good and just – so do it!

Is that your heart, as a believer? As a servant of Jesus, do you give Him a blank cheque assuming that whatever is of Him and from Him is ideal? If you want to be a servant of Jesus Christ, then Mary’s “whatever” must be the default response to Him that echoes into your Christian walk today.

***2<sup>nd</sup> Cor 1:20 tells us: “For all of God’s promises have been fulfilled in Christ.”***

It is not just about listening to what Jesus says, it is about obeying His commandments. We love Jesus by obeying Him.

### **The death of Jesus on the cross.**

Can you imagine what it would have been like for Mary to stand by, watching her Son and Lord be crucified and not be able to stop it or comfort Him? This is the most painful and most challenging moment of Jesus’ life.

Even when He is doing the most important act in the whole of the universe, He notices Mary, His mother. It would have been hard for Jesus to speak due to the suffocating nature of the crucifixion and you can hear that by how brief Jesus’ sentences are. He

squeezes out the last things He wants to say, the things that are too important to leave unsaid before He dies. And He uses some of those phrases to notice and address His mother.

This would have been any mother's worst nightmare. Standing helpless to intervene as your firstborn is dying alone and in agony. The connection of someone you have carried in your body, carried in your heart, now experiencing everything Jesus is experiencing must be almost too much to bear. A figurative sword is piercing her heart as she witnesses her son dying even as a literal sword will shortly pierce Jesus' heart. But she has refused to leave Him and He refuses to leave her. Jesus is present to her. He sees her, He acknowledges her, He listens.

Mary represents the Jewish people in John's Gospel and here we see Jesus fulfilling His own prophecy. Jesus in His most abandoned is also most maternal as He gathers her up like a hen gathers her chicks.

And what Jesus does with this conversation with His mother, at the turning point of all history, starts something fundamentally new. We often believe the church was born at Pentecost, but I believe it began long before this.

***Matt 12:48-50 "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers? Jesus pointed to His disciples and said, "Look these are my mother and brothers. Anyone who does the will of My Father in Heaven is My brother and sister and mother."***

Jesus outlines a new way to think of family. In Jesus' imagination family is not merely about biology. Our understanding about blood relations becomes something different as we are connected by belief and faith in Him and His Father in Heaven.

This is a new miracle. Mary finds that Jesus is with her and then she finds that there are others with her too. A seemingly random collection of friends and family. Perhaps not people she would have chosen but often in times of crisis this is the case. This doesn't take the pain away, but the sharing of pain makes it more bearable. Doesn't it? When we realise, we are not alone.

Jesus turns to her and says "Woman here is your son" indicating not to Himself but to John, the beloved disciple. And He turns to the disciple and says, "Behold your mother." Now Mary and John are joined in a covenanted, committed relationship through Jesus.

While most of the disciples had scattered, like a mother hen, Jesus gathers those He loves together, under His wings. This is more than a kind provision for His broken-hearted mother and friend. Jesus here is starting something that reimagines what mothering, what family is all about.

The church sometimes lives up to this. I recall when I was in America and I attended the First Baptist Church in Tennessee, consisting of almost all African American people. I felt "out of place" being white, but I found a community who treated me like family. Entry to this wider family of Christ is now not by biology but by the blood of Christ.

If Jesus reached out to Mary from the cross, how much more is He reaching out to you, who are now His family too, today as He sits in glory. When we are in pain and suffering, we are encouraged to come to Christ, the mother who gathers and who creates new life.

Today there are many needing to belong to a family. Is there anyone near to you today who Jesus might be inviting you to become family to? Is there a mother on your street? Could there be a beloved child near you who you could reach out to with the love of Jesus?

Jesus calls all of us to reimagine with Him what motherhood and family could be. To turn our imaginations to the possibilities that people of all genders, in our lives might hold that same wonder as we encounter them, as we do when we hold a new-born in our arms. Each person is a unique and mysterious gift from God.

Then to imagine with Jesus His wider concept of family, a family that has a place for all. And we are recognised in this family not by birth but by baptism.