



The Avenue Uniting Church

Sunday 12th May, 2024

"On Mother's Day..."

Listening for Sacred Wisdom

Jochabed's Story

Exodus 2:1-10

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. "This must be one of the Hebrews' children," she said.

Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages."

So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

This is not a test! But I wonder...

how many of us would have remembered who Jochabed was, before we heard the story, or saw the picture.?

How we'd have gone at a Quiz night if the question had been "*what was the name of Moses' mother?*"

[I know that the people at my table would have said: "*Come on Rod, you're religious, you should have known that!*" And they'd be right.]

A few weeks ago, I spoke here about women who are invisible and/or un-named in the biblical stories – and here's another. You'll notice that Jochabed is only named here as "*a woman*", or "*the woman*" or "*the child's mother*". That's true of each of the women in this story: we only hear Jochabed's name a few chapters later, along with that of her daughter Miriam. [Moses' adoptive mother, "*pharaoh's Daughter*", gives him his name, but never gets named herself].

Why am I talking about this today?

Well, because in spite of not being able to remember Jochabed's name, hers was the story that came into my mind, as I thought about the mothers in our biblical stories.

We've not read it today to 'prove' any particular point I wanted to make about motherhood and faith, or motherhood and the bible. I asked Cathryn to read it because Jochabed's story deserves to be heard.

It's a story far removed from the 'Hallmark' version of Mother's Day, from the advertising version that says "*Show your Mum how much you love her with a (very expensive) gift from XYZ Jewellers*" [I guess it's good that they've moved on from suggesting irons and vacuum cleaners as Mother's Day gifts!] I'm not saying there's anything wrong with nice gifts, by the way, generosity is lovely. I just think there are better measures of love.

I actually don't want to say too much about the story, I'd rather pause with it, and be present to it together – in conversation.

And then I'd like to invite us to reflect together on the stories and experiences around motherhood that we hold dear today.

I have a couple of thoughts in each parts of that conversation, and imagine you do too. So that will be our shared 'sacred wisdom', which we'll draw together in our Prayers of the People

For me, the two images in my mind today are of watching as my wife gave birth to each of our two children, 32 and 30 years ago...

And of my Mother sitting by my hospital bed for hours when I was a kid – I had quite a few stays in hospital – just in case I needed her. (The amount of knitting she must have done!)

Prayers of the People

begins with the beautiful Taize Chant *"Ubi Caritas, et amor, ubi caritas, deus ibi est"*

"Where love and charity are, there is GOD"

Prayer continues...

GOD who is life, today we join our nation in honouring the gift of life in motherhood; a gift sacred and precious.

Among us, and beyond us, is a wide variety of experience of motherhood; held in memories, shared stories, and personal moments: unique as each mother/child relationship is unique.

We honour these today, knowing that some relationships hold celebration, and some hold brokenness – many hold both!

This is the reality of human life, and in our prayers, our stories, and our memories, may we hold it gently and compassionately.

And we pray for all people for whom this is a tough day, through loss, through broken relationships, and for all kinds of reasons.

Particularly, even though it's painful, we pray for people whose experience of motherhood today is shaped by the violence against women so rife in our nation.

We pray for new mothers, joyous in the gift of their baby, yet feeling an exhaustion they never knew possible.

We pray for mothers of young children, delighting in each new stage in their little one's growth, while juggling all sorts of demands on their time and energy.

We pray for mothers of all ages who wonder what the future holds for their children, while doing their best to prepare for it.

We pray for grandmothers and great grandmothers, in the richness of the love and experience they have, to give and to receive.

We pray for mothers whose children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren are far away today.

And so, holy GOD, we celebrate Mother's Day with our community. May our celebration be care-filled, honest, and generous. AMEN

Blessings,

Rod Peppiatt

