

“JESUS AND HIS MUM”

John 19:23-27

Christianity is often criticised for being a male-dominated, patriarchal religion – patriarchal being a word derived from the Latin for father. We talk of God our Father and get very hot under the collar if anyone tries to suggest any other way of referring to him. It seems that the great heroes of the Bible are men – Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Samuel and so on – and we tend to think of them as the really important figures of the faith. Jesus came into our world as a male baby and Paul appears to be quiet disparaging of women.

But actually, if you look at the stories of the Bible and take into account the fact that they were written during times when men did seem to dominate much of everyday life, you'll find that there's probably more than you'd expect about women. As we were thinking about at the early service today and as Anne reminded us earlier in this service, there's plenty about God our Father that is expressed in maternal language – God as our Mother. Jesus may have been a man in his physical appearance, but he spent a lot of time talking to women and subverting some of the conventions of his day as he connected with them in ways that were thought of as pretty unusual at the time. Paul's pronouncements about women have often been misinterpreted because of our own particular biases and prejudices. And looking into the Old Testament there is plenty there to remind us that women in general, and mothers in particular, are absolutely key to the story of God's unfolding plan of redemption for humanity.

Just think of what would have happened if Sarah had not been involved in the plan to make Abraham the father of many nations. Where would the people of Israel have ended up had it not been for the faith and enterprise of Jochebed, Moses' mother? The story of Ruth meant that Obed was born – and he ended up being the grandfather of King David. Then, there's Hannah, mother of Samuel and, of course, Mary, whose obedience and faith enabled Jesus to be born. It goes without saying that the genealogy of God's grace would not have been possible without mothers – and many of those were women of outstanding faith and obedience. Being a mother is not an easy task – and there's even more pressure if you happen to be a part of the great story of salvation.

It's easy to overlook the mothers – partly, as we've said, because of the way in which the fathers, the men, seem to have assumed greater importance, and partly because we just take them so much for granted. That's why the annual opportunity to think about what they mean for us, and to thank them for their love and continuing care for us, is such a good idea – and we do want to thank God for them and to thank them for all that they do for us.

Mum's are, indeed – for most of us – and everyday part of our lives. And we can so easily take them for granted. They're one of those everyday things that are so common, so integral to our lives, that we accept them without thinking. And often we can think that the everyday things of life don't really bother Jesus – he's somehow only concerned with the big things, the important people, the “spiritual” things in our lives. On the face of it, the stories we find in the Bible – or, at least, the ones we tend to concentrate on – are all about amazing events and great characters, and don't have a lot to do with us today.

Well, what Jesus did was pretty spectacular sometimes, but that certainly doesn't mean he wasn't concerned with the ordinary things of life as well. Just think of some of the stuff he got inveigled with. The very first miracle he did was at a wedding – he'd gone along as a guest (with his mum) and ended up helping as the wine ran out. He wasn't in a church or somewhere holy: he was at a party.

Jesus was concerned about people's lunch when he fed the five thousand people who had come to listen to him. He showed interest in their daily work, helping the fishermen around Galilee on several occasions. He told his helpers not to shoo away the children when they were brought to him for a blessing because he was interested in them as well.

Many of the stories we have about him are to do with helping ordinary people who were ill or in difficulty get better. That's fairly ordinary, too. When we get ill, we want to get better – what could be more down to earth than that? Jesus was concerned about families – think about the daughter of Jairus; the widow at Nain whose son had died; Mary and Martha, the two sisters whose brother Lazarus died; the mother-in-law of his disciple Peter who was suffering from a fever.

And today, particularly, we remember that Jesus was concerned about mums, especially his own mother. If you think back to the story about his getting lost in Jerusalem and not seeming to care that his parents were worried, you may think he didn't really care. If you think about the occasion when his mother and brothers said he was mad (*Mark 3:21*), or the time he said that he had no mother or brothers and ignored them preferring instead to refer to his followers as his mother and brothers (*Matthew 12:48-50*) – if you think about those occasions you might conclude that he had not time for his family, and certainly not for his mother. But we've just heard the story from John's Gospel about Jesus' words from the cross, ensuring that his mum was alright.

Why was Jesus up there on the cross? He was there to take our place, to take on himself the punishment that we all deserve for all the wrong things we have done, to accept in his own body the consequences of all our wrong choice, wrong decisions. He was hanging there to save the world! That might sound a bit dramatic, but that's what it boils down to. The eternal destiny of everyone in the world was on his shoulders as he hung there naked, humiliated and in absolute agony. He was, as we might say, under a lot of pressure. And as he looked down from the cross, he could see a little group of women and one of his disciples, the disciple called John.

One of those women was Mary, his mother, and she was going to be left rather alone when Jesus died. It's assumed that her husband Joseph had died some time before (after all, he's not mentioned in any of the places where the rest of the family appear) and, at this point, it seems her other children didn't want anything to do with Jesus or with her. But we don't find John shouting up to Jesus, "What shall we do about your mum, Jesus?" and Jesus shouting back, "Don't bother me now. Can't you see I'm saving the world?" No, Jesus sees the situation and does something about it before anyone needs to ask. He tells John to look after Mary from now on and tells her to treat John as her own son, so that she can be looked after for the rest of her life. And that shows us two simple things about Jesus that can help us in our own situations. Firstly, something for us to do, and then something for us to ask Jesus to do.

1. JESUS SHOWS US HOW TO TREAT OUR FAMILIES

Do you sometimes get exasperated when someone in your family wants you to do something and you're trying to concentrate on something else? Do you find that some things get you so involved that you don't have time for anyone else – maybe your housework, or a programme on the television, or you're texting or reading the newspaper or knitting? So your mum – or dad or brothers or sisters – get left out? Jesus was pretty involved in things when he was on the cross. He had every reason to appear preoccupied, but he was still anxious to sort things out for his mum. And that was despite the fact that she'd thought he was bonkers and tried to dissuade him from his mission at one point.

Jesus is a good example to follow – in this as in everything else. Never ignore your family (or your friends, for that matter). Never say you haven't got time for them, or that you're too busy to get involved or to help them. Remember Jesus on the cross. Even at his moment of greatest agony, when he was doing battle on our behalf with all the forces of evil that were arrayed against him, he had time for his mum – and for the thieves on either side of him. Never neglect your family.

2. JESUS CARES ABOUT EVERY PART OF OUR LIVES

It's easy to think, as we said earlier on, that Jesus is interested only in the big things in our lives, or the bits of our lives that are to do with church or that kind of thing. But Jesus is concerned about everything. He's never too busy to help you, whatever your problem. He listens to everyone's prayers and is prepared

to help. If he was able to show that he was concerned with what was going to happen to his mum while he was hanging on the cross saving the world, then surely he is concerned about and wants to help with your life at home, at work, at school, wherever.

Now that's not some nice little moral message – a kind of school assembly homily. That's a great truth for all of us for all the time. Peter, whose letter we were reading from last week, says elsewhere in that letter, "*Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you*" (1 Peter 5:7). The Jesus who looked after his mum while he was hanging on the cross still wants to look after you today. He wants you – he commands you – to come and throw all your cares on him so that he can help you work them through. They might be cares about your parents – or cares that you have as a parent about your children, or about other aspects of your lives. But he can help. He can give you the strength and the wisdom to confront and overcome those cares.

The biggest anxiety many of us will have is to do with our own lives – to do with our standing before God and the regrets we have about how we have responded to him. We are anxious that we will one day have to meet him and account for all that. We are unsure about the eternal future and where we might be spending it. Jesus has decisively dealt with that problem – that's what he was doing on the cross – so he asks you simply to acknowledge that and recognise the fact that you need him, to kneel at his feet and receive his help, his forgiveness, to accept the offer of new life, life that begins now and goes on forever. Don't pass up that opportunity this morning. The Jesus who showed love and concern for his mum while he hung on the cross loves you and is concerned about you this morning. Reach out and accept his offer of peace.