

Study notes for w/c 31 March 2019

"Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love." Mother Theresa

Looking at adverts and displays in some shop windows, it's clear that Mothering Sunday (or as more commonly labelled Mothers Day) has become something conceptually pink and indelibly associated with saccharine verse, chocolates and flowers. The Bible though, makes it clear that the position of women, of motherhood, and of our relationship with our mothers, is something far more important.

Let's begin at the beginning – the name Eve is usually thought to mean "living one" or "source of life". In Genesis 2, she is described as being a 'helper' for Adam. Far from implying helplessness or subordination, the Hebrew original, *ezer*, is used elsewhere in the Bible to describe God, as in Deuteronomy 33:29; Psalm 10:14; Psalm 33:20; Psalm 70:5. She is described here as someone competent who comes alongside to help the less able; one might even say, the 'strong rescuer' of the man! How does this help you see what the rest of bible says about men and women?

Read Psalm. 91: 1-6 & 14-16 and John 19: 23-27

In these passages, we are shown two aspects of motherhood within the biblical narrative:

1. To describe some aspects of God's nature requires us to use maternal concepts. As well as this Psalm, there are many others instances, for example, Psalm 131; Isaiah 66:13; Hosea 13:8. When you reflect on these, how do you feel? People are often quick to say that maternal images for God are very much metaphors, yet defend thinking about masculine images as somehow being real. Why do think that is?

We must always remember that God is neither male nor female in our normal sense of those words (though both man and woman are fully and wholly in the image of God – Genesis 1:27). It is rather that masculine and feminine images and metaphors have been used by biblical writers because they say something true about God and about their experience with God.

2. Jesus concern for his mother even as he was crucified. Note that many commentators would actually identify John (the beloved disciple) as also being a cousin of Jesus and so Mary's nephew. How do think each would have described this moment as they reflected on it later?

In a fractured society where so many are called on to be mother for children born into now lost relationships, reflect on the extent to which 'motherness' is something that one is or something that one does. More generally, why do we so often focus on what people *do* rather than who they *are*?

"To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one... To love is to be vulnerable." C.S. Lewis