

Ian Wallace's Sermon for Mother's Day Service 31st March 2014

Many thanks to Sally for all the posies produced

I pray that the words from my mouth reflect what is in your heart and that these words help us to serve you - amen

I am very aware that as a man to comment on motherhood can be a treacherous and dangerous path - and I will be aware of which eyes will be questioning me like my mother used to do to me when I was much younger - and to that matter last week!!

My talk for today could have been very traditional - the history of mothering Sunday, the traditions within the church, but when something is triggered in your mind, some thought that needs to be explored, --- or another way of looking at what we are comfortable with,

and after reflection and prayer you feel the need to share and explore your thinking with others. So today I wouldn't say I'm going out on a limb but i would say that what I'm about to say does not come without a little anxiety especially on mothering Sunday, but if questions are raised, a discussion follows, further thoughts are explored then i feel i will have done what has been asked of me

At times I am an emotional soul - and enjoy any good drama that has the ability to draw a tear or two and it always seems I'm the one it targets and boy..... sometimes it hits me like a tonne of bricks - here is one example

Who has watched Call the Midwife ?

Because its been on a Sunday evening - when the routine of getting kids to bed, school bags packed, showers and the debate about how much longer the homework should have taken takes a priority - and that 8.30 bedtime means 8.30 and not the inevitable discussion that 9 pm is a fairer time now I am older - we tape the programme and watch it the following evening with the Kids.

The last episode in the present series was for me incredibly poignant and knowing that I was involved in this service gave me an emotional jolt.

It was the death of one of the nurses mothers - a titled diplomats wife - a difficult relationship where class and status meant the loving mother daughter relationship did not take place even though the daughters love was unflinching - a daughter who had undertaken a career "under" her status and married a "common" policeman - but here at the end of one life the barriers to the true mother daughter relationship fell away - The mother could express her love and pride for her daughter, love for her grandson and respect for her husband - and she in turn could take the mask of stiffness off and curl up against her mother and hold her close as she breathed her last with true friends and her husband close by.

And as I sat there asking "why now", "why not years ago" , "what about those lost times and regrets" - Statements I could easily say to myself about many things in my own life - yet beneath this frustration at what had not happened in the past - there was unquestionably the clear deep love for each other - tested by social conventions, boarding school , class and acceptance of the norms of the day which at the end could not put out the love between child and mother

This was an ideal end - one to create emotion and tears because we could feel the pain of the past and yet in my tears be glad of the way it ended, difficult and traumatic as it was a resolution of the past through the simple demonstration of the love between a mother and Daughter

we see in two of our readings other examples where the love of a mother and child are tested

When Moses mother took the decision to cast her son away in a basket she took the only decision she felt she could take even if it cost her her sons life and a life of guilt and uncertainty -

Thankfully here her son was saved and the mother had the opportunity to nurse him while he grew up with the protection of the Pharaoh's daughter - even if it had to be kept a secret.

In our other reading - the line that is relevant here is when Simeon told Mary

"And a sword will pierce your very soul."

A moment to pause and reflect - To Mary, as she truly begins to understand the special role her son will have on earth, this must have been something incredibly difficult to bear and understand - and as we will see in a few weeks time we will once again will share her pain at the death of her son - before we celebrate the coming of OUR saviour -

her loss was personal and painful so that we could be saved

these both represent the potential pain and suffering of motherhood -

And as we prepare for the 100th anniversary for the beginning of the 1st world war we can also remember the pain of millions of mothers in the world soon to say goodbye to their children as they go off to war - some being strong and proud, for many the letting go of a son, many in fear yet perhaps unable to show it because of the pain it will bring to themselves and their children and over the next 4 years the endless telegrams with the news of loss or injury or just missing believed killed -

Motherhood in its sad, difficult, painful and challenging times is managed by the strength of motherhood - If we reread the new testament reading we are asked to live in a certain way

12-14 So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.

If we look at the role of motherhood -we can easily transcribe how these fits into how a mother aspires to be - perhaps not always, perhaps not as much as an individual might want, perhaps wondering why they can't ever seem to get it right, for those who truly struggle to be the best they can be

for some motherhood is not to be part of their lives out of choice, through circumstances beyond their control, through decisions inflicted in them by others, through illness or events are unfulfilled but we do see most, if not all of these attributes at some time or another in the majority of mothers, and these strengths and attributes are not necessarily given by instruction or guidance or by example but by the very nature of motherhood, the unique essence of who a mother is,

to their own children, grandchildren, to an adopted or fostered child, nephews and nieces, their neighbours and friends, their communities, their Church and as in *Call the Midwife* - perhaps to their own mother as they pass on - and these attributes are tested by the pain, sorrow and tragedy and rewarded with the joys, successes and personal fulfilment within their offspring and all those they have cared for.- even when it is not as is expected.

to absorb these attributes into our day to day lives is what we are called upon to do - even as we have seen when all around might be filled with tragedy, fear and sorrow

As the Dalai Lama said - "the purpose of all major religious traditions is not to construct big temples on the outside, but to create temples of goodness and compassion inside, in our hearts"

By taking on these virtues in Colossians, which we see lived out in the trials and tribulations of a mothers heart, -we can continue to grow our temple with the actions of those around us whether they be christian or not - and to deal with the moments of joy and happiness along with the times and events that test us to our limits - we simply need to look around within our family to know what to do

But what of this family of ours we call church - we sometimes gather together because we are not perfect, we are often broken but are not prepared to show it, we have secrets we are scared or embarrassed to share, we have faults we wear like a heavy coat, we grumble under our breath yet are not prepared to speak our mind like a child, we lose our temper with those we love most, we exclude those who we don't feel comfortable with or just follow the crowd so as to fit in with the majority

so as with motherhood Christ asks us through his church to be welcoming, not just to those who fit in but also to those who do not - to love without question, to assist when a person's life is not all it should be, to nurture people , to feed people, to truly listen and understand, to console and give hope, to grow stronger with the addition of those, who in our mind, "don't fit in" with but over time become an accepted and integral part of who we are as Christ's mothering church, to all who want to be part of it we should welcome and love, and like a mother this love is full and unconditional

As the American AW Tozer suggested

"An infinite God can give all of Himself to each of His children. He does not distribute Himself that each may have a part, but to each one He gives all of Himself as fully as if there were no others." a apt quote for motherhood and our churchmanship

so the message for us is that motherhood isn't always easy - it tests , - it can hurt , it can bring suffering and sadness but it also brings amazing joy, happiness, satisfaction, hope, pride in those you care for and nurture and someone who will always be there for you and the rewards that are reaped from the love of those you have mothered in whatever form or manner that might have taken a lesson any church can take on board

one thing is for certain we as a church, as Christians , we can learn a thing or two from those around us who hold a beautiful posy of flowers - we just need to ask, thank them, and then thank God

We had a great turnout and many thanks to Simon for playing the guitar for the songs and all those who set up the hall. A new venue and a slightly different style of communion (we passed the bread and wine from person to person) and a different liturgy (though still in line with Church of England) left a really positive feeling for those who came and something to consider for widening the style of church to reach out to a wider "audience" who seek out something different form our red book services.