

St Augustine and St Mary's: Reflection and Prayers offered this week by Karen.

Sunday 14th March Mothering Sunday (and 4th Sunday in Lent).

***Bible Readings* : Exodus 2 : 1-10; 1 Samuel 1 : 20-end; Psalm 34 : 11-20; Psalm 127 : 1-4; 2 Corinthians 1 : 3-7; Colossians 3 : 12 -17; Luke 2 : 33-35; John 19 25b – 27.**

On Mothering Sunday we are offered an array of Bible readings to draw on – we are invited to consider : those who were mothers to Moses (both his birth mother and his adoptive Egyptian mother); Hannah the mother of Samuel; Mary on the occasions of the presentation of the Christ-child in the temple and at the foot of the cross with John. There will be many other mothers whose stories are recorded in Scripture that we are familiar with – Sara(h); Hagar; Rachel; Rebecca; Leah; Ruth; Naomi; Elizabethand many nameless women known only as “the mother of...” all of whom play pivotal roles in the unfolding of God’s story with all humanity through the ages.

As we consider these women we are also invited to consider all those who have nurtured us in the faith – Mothering Sunday was traditionally the occasion to return to your “mother” church – the church you grew up in – so for us it is perhaps an opportunity to look back and to remember with thankfulness all those – female and male - who have shaped and influenced our faith – those who have taught us, prayed for us, nurtured us, brought us to faith – and perhaps in turn that might encourage and challenge us to identify those people for whom we now pray and nurture in the faith. Today’s verses from Colossians may be a good starting point for our thoughts here

“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.”

Mothering Sunday is also an occasion to reflect on some of the images of God as mother – biblical images; images found in our prayers and liturgies; iconography and other artistic images of God.

For those who have read or watched “The Shack” you will remember that the three persons of the Trinity are depicted as a black woman, and Asian man and a woman from the far east.

In the 15th century, the figures in Rublev’s icon of the Trinity, based on the story of the hospitality of Abraham (Genesis 18) have a distinctively feminine form, as opposed to the far more ubiquitous bearded figures of most other icons of the time.

In Proverbs “wisdom” is personified in female form and theologians often draw parallels between the understanding of this personified “wisdom” and the Holy Spirit.



I have been reading a new book on the Lord's Prayer written by Stephen Cherry, and I would like to share something from that which has enlightened my thinking. He points out that Jesus teaching his disciples to pray "Our Father" was a radical change, no longer were they to address God as Almighty or Judge or Lord or Master but as Father, Jesus was moving people's understanding of God from the institutional to the relational, from the all powerful potentate to the one who gives life. He goes on to argue that "Our Father" encompasses both the motherhood and fatherhood of God, the "motherly father" exemplified in Jesus words :

"I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings....."
Luke 13 v.34

A few weeks ago Ela enlightened us to the significance of the Hebrew letter *h* as representative of God, but also that the "El Shadai" name for God has at its root the word *shadaim* which means breasts. Other scholars highlight the Egyptian verb *shdi* meaning "to suckle" which would make El Shaddai the God who suckles. In the New Testament, John's gospel uses the metaphor of the pain and ultimate joy of childbirth to speak of Christ's death and resurrection.

Many of these understandings and imagery is picked up in one of the great prayers of the church – the song of St Anselm.

Song of St Anselm

*Jesus, like a mother you gather your people to you;
you are gentle with us as a mother with her children.
Often you weep over our sins and our pride,
tenderly you draw us from hatred and judgement.
You comfort us in sorrow and bind up our wounds,
in sickness you nurse us, and with pure milk you feed us.
Jesus, by your dying we are born to new life;
by your anguish and labour we come forth in joy.
Despair turns to hope through your sweet goodness;
through your gentleness we find comfort in fear.
Your warmth gives life to the dead, your touch makes sinners righteous.
Lord Jesus, in your mercy heal us; in your love and tenderness remake us.
In your compassion bring grace and forgiveness,
and for the beauty of heaven may your love prepare us.*



Rembrandt's painting "The Return of the Prodigal" depicts each hand of the forgiving father quite differently, and it is suggested one is a typically feminine form and the other typically masculine. Both the feminine and the masculine are held together in the Divine.

I think there is something helpful and healthy and more complete about the understanding of God's nature and God's relationship with us found in the term "motherly father".

Revd. Claire Dawson cdawson@blueyonder.co.uk 0114 272 4987: Day off Friday
Revd. Karen Cribb revkaren@stmaryschurch.co.uk Mobile: 07580 378507: Day off Tuesday
Revd Cannon Mike West mike.west23@tiscali.co.uk 0114 266 2188
Revd. Dr. Ela Hall 0114 268 7002 elanutuhall@gmail.com