



A Reflection for Mothering Sunday 2020

David Newman, Warden of Launde Abbey

Standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

John 19: 25-27

They say that a sweater is a garment worn by a child when their mother feels chilly. Mothers are programmed to fuss sometimes. It's part of the job description. It's part of the anxiety of being a parent – like when Mary and Joseph found the twelve year old Jesus in the temple after he'd gone missing for three days at the end of the Passover holiday. "Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you," she says. Jesus' reply indicated that he had other priorities.

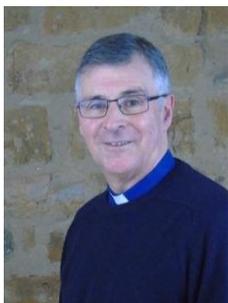
There is a very fine line between anxiety and care. It's interesting that when Jesus in the sermon on the mount says 'Do not worry' he is using the same root word as is translated elsewhere in the New Testament as *concern* or *care* – as when the apostle Paul talks about his daily concern for all the churches. So let's not knock the anxious parent too hard. The challenge is how to let our capacity to be anxious, which is often inward looking and about us, be channelled outwardly into care and compassion for others.

Whatever Jesus may have said or however he may have behaved towards his mother - and in his younger days he could be quite sharp – we see extraordinary care towards her in his dying moments on the cross. As she stands beneath him with the beloved disciple he speaks the famous words "Woman here is your son" and to the disciple... "here is

your mother.” Not only is he revealing here the enduring importance of family relationships, but also showing how they point to something beyond themselves – to the caring supportive relationships in the community that would bear his name after his death. Compassion had taken him to the place of ultimate self sacrifice as he dies painfully on the cross. Such love – the sort of sacrificial love that parents at best have for their children was to mark his followers too.

We are entering one of the most testing times for our society, for our country, for the world in living memory. The strength of family life, and our wider community is going to be tested. Empty supermarket shelves suggest that we won't find it easy to conquer anxiety and trust others for our immediate needs. However neighbourhood schemes for watching out for the elderly or vulnerable suggest that we might have it in us to turn that outwards into caring compassionately. I have heard people recall the story of the village of Eyam during the plague in 1665. When 23 villagers had fallen victim to it after being infected by a germ-containing parcel of clothes, the vicar called the village together and persuaded them not to flee the community but to isolate themselves from the outside world until the plague died down. At the end of it, 259 people had died through the disease – but the plague had been contained and not spread to the outside world.

On this Mothering Sunday we thank God for the loving sacrifices of parental love. We consider the challenge not to let anxiety inform our behaviour as we face the coronavirus pandemic, but to discover the power and beauty of turning that outwards in care and compassion. We look again at the supreme model for such love in the crucified Christ, in his dying care for his mother and friend, and in the hope he brings of a different and better world.



David Newman has been the warden of Launde Abbey for three years and enjoys the opportunity to support people in their spiritual growth and development through leading retreats, courses, quiet days, and spiritual direction. He has a long experience of pastoral leadership in the church through incumbencies in Derby and Loughborough and most recently as archdeacon of Loughborough. His first book “Growing up into the Children of God” was published last year.