



Mothering Sunday

w/c 10 March 2024

"Give your hands to serve, and your hearts to love."

(Mother Theresa)

Christians are liable to get rather hot under the collar about the differences between Mother's Day (Bad) and Mothering Sunday (Good). While Mother's Day is often written off as mere commercialism, it was started in 1907 as church service intended to celebrate, within a religious setting, mothers and all they do. Its founder later spent much energy railing against its takeover by the greetings-card and flower industries. In most countries it is observed on the second Sunday in May.

From medieval times, the focus of Mothering Sunday was on a believer's relationship with their 'mother church'. As the Industrial Revolution separated families that gradually shifted towards family reunion and, in particular, contact with and appreciation for one's mother. It only really gained its modern form early in the twentieth century as an explicit reaction against the Mother's Day movement. Not against its sentiment and concept but rather through a belief that there was no need for another celebration – Mothering Sunday already fulfilled that need.

Whatever we call it, as we reflect on its current form, a number of questions seem pertinent:

Why are roses and chocolate (and pinkness) seen as a fitting image of our love towards our mothers? How could we improve things?

How should we help those for whom – for different reasons – Mothering Sunday / Mother's Day will be a difficult time?

As we reflect on possible exemplars for celebrating motherhood, we would do well to remember the biblical illustrations of God as maternal in his care. See, for example, Psalm 131, Isaiah 66:13 and Hosea 13:8. How do we ensure that these traits are properly represented in our approach to living as God's children? How do we avoid the cliched images of God as purely masculine – for example the well-known image from the Sistine Chapel ceiling? Remember that Genesis makes it clear that both men and women are equally in God's image.

Read John 19:25-27

It would appear that John may have been Jesus' cousin - Matthew, Mark and John variously name Zebedee's wife, Salome and Jesus' maternal aunt as the third prominent character in the crowd of women observing the crucifixion. While the gospel writers may have made differing selections from the "many women who were there", it seems more likely, to me, that the third name refers to the same person. Why then do think Jesus would call on John to look after her? Nothing in the gospel accounts suggest she was in need and, in Acts (1:14) it is clear that her other sons were part of the first church community.

Who is God calling you to befriend and help?

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

It's important to get this the right way round – "troubles" are not good. Our experience can though play a vital part in how we are able to help others. However, we cannot always expect to only encounter those with needs we have ourselves experienced. How can we learn to be empathetic with those where we haven't experienced what they have? How do we avoid spouting unhelpful cliches - "Yes, I understand.", or even, "Yes, the same thing happened to me" at such times?