

30.3.14 (Mothering Sunday)

EXODUS 2:1-10

JOHN 19:35-37

PROTECTION

My brother is a teacher at a big secondary school. He told me a story of a difficult meeting with parents whose son had been involved in bullying another boy. The parents seem outwardly respectable but during the meeting they began to accuse the school (by jabbing their fingers, raising their voices and threatening all sorts of action) of not protecting their child or dealing with things properly. It was as if the school had started the problem, not the boys! It turned out that those parents are often away from home a lot with work and my brother began to wonder if this was a kind of guilty response that came from the fact that they themselves, were not giving the kind of support and security and protection that their son really needed.

Protection is a human need and a human instinct. Our bible stories today give us two situations where mothers want to protect their sons.

Moses is born into the wrong place at the wrong time. Pharaoh wants to stop the Jewish slave population overwhelming the Egyptians and orders that all baby boys under the age of 2 years are killed. You can't keep a small child quiet for long, so the only option seems to be to put him somewhere that a compassionate person may find him and keep him safe. It works. And look what it shows- as so often in history, people who are thought to be on different sides actually have the same human qualities and desires. So an Egyptian woman wants to protect and care for a lost and vulnerable baby as much as his Jewish mother. Not so different after all.

At the foot of the cross, Mary faces the awful, painful truth that she couldn't protect her son forever. At different stages of his life, Mary has tried to take him away from places that seemed difficult, and from places where people might cause harm. But from the outset, it wasn't going to be straightforward for the

mother of an unusual child. She has to step back and let him do what he feels right. So she faces the consequences. She couldn't stop him being hurt and she couldn't avoid the hurt herself. Now Jesus turns it round and asks someone else to protect her as best they can.

It is an instinct to protect a child, for most parents. Some feel their guilt when they don't do it so well, perhaps like the school parents. Some have to watch whilst others take over, like the mother of Moses. Some feel the pain themselves when they can't keep away all the hurt, like Mary.

But look what those two characters became: Moses the leader of a nation; Jesus, the saviour and protector of the world. Each mother did their job and each child went their way.

We cannot all be mothers of Moses or Jesus-types. Some of us are not mothers at all. We certainly cannot manage to protect everyone we meet who has a need. But taking care of the individuals we *are* given to protect can have a result that's bigger than we might ever imagine.

Let us keep asking God to show us who he wants US to protect, and to give us the grace to do it well, and not leave the responsibility to anyone else.

Hilary Edgerton