

## Lent 4 John 9:1-41

Lent 4 has been traditionally a break in the Lenten marathon for a bit of joy and happiness in the Anglican Church and is sometimes known as Mothering Sunday. As the connection between mother's day and mothering Sunday is not in place here in Australia, it all suddenly seems rather out of place in our Lenten observances, and rather out of place when looking at today's readings.

Another term used for this 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in lent was refreshment Sunday, this was born out of the collect for the day that prayed that God's family the church would be refreshed and strengthened by God's grace, perhaps that is a better term than Mothering Sunday and yet the qualities of mothering can be seen to shine through the readings, and indeed much of scripture, because mothering is bound up with love.

We have to be careful not to go too far with the connection of motherhood with the love of God, neither should we do the same with the image of Fatherhood, because from a human perspective we get this stuff wrong all of the time and if we refer to God's relationship with us as identical to that of a parent, we risk making it difficult for some people to engage with it, some people who have not had wonderful relationships with parents or children and then can't accept a God who treats them like that type of Father or mother has.

Perhaps that is why it is better that our readings are not primarily concerned with human mother/child relations. They are hinted at, alluded to and used to describe in metaphors God's relationship with humanity but the inspired word of God is not so easily boxed in with the commercial card company's poems and verses.

The reality is that when we are born we are in a constant process of separation from our mothers. The reason that we look for a day to celebrate our mothers is that often we are asserting independence from them. The initial separation of birth is followed by smaller assertions of independence when we learn to walk, to feed ourselves, dress ourselves, the first day at school – the whole process of developing into a person. It is not always an easy process and sometimes letting go to that next stage of development is very painful.

Parenthood can be described in these terms; bringing up a child is like handling glass, you can do the glass a lot of damage, it can get chipped, cracked or even smashed to pieces but even if you are as careful as possible and the glass remains in one piece you will still have left your fingerprints upon it. We are all affected by our relationship with our parents and although we would like those relationships to always be positive the reality is that this is not always the case.

But what of our gospel today, long as it was, how does that relate. Well it is an account of Jesus showing that radical and powerful love that causes him to draw negative and possibly dangerous attention to himself, on the Sabbath by healing a man blind from birth because he loves him. The people are all accusing this man of being a sinner or perhaps it was his parents, they would add to his disability the guilt of being responsible for his condition. Jesus just sees a man in distress and his heart goes out to him. Not only does he receive his sight, he is also declared publicly as an innocent in his condition.

Jesus seems concerned not so much by the fact that the man was born blind, but that he was being made to suffer for his condition, isolated from his community, unable to

work because of his condition and held up by the religious authorities as the poster boy of sin, if you sin this will happen to you or your children. How far from love are these thoughts. How very different from the compassion of God that we experience through Jesus, how very distinct from the love a parent feels for their children, whatever their flaws.

Jesus described God in the parable of the prodigal son as the person who would be there waiting for us even if we turn our backs on him completely, which is often the role of a mother. It highlights our understanding that motherhood is about unconditional love, and unconditional love is exactly what we are offered by God.

But our calling as Christians is not just to receive the grace of God but to share it, to forgive as we have been forgiven, to love as we have been loved, perhaps to mother as we have been mothered. And that means all of us, men and women, parents or not, the attributes of care and concern that the word mothering evokes are part of our calling as Christians. Jesus is our pattern and example, we must, like him, engage with people that others reject and see the whole person not the flaws that are there within us all. We need to consider who are the marginalised of our day? Perhaps it is people with disabilities, and not necessarily ones we can see, what of those we know with the invisible disabilities of mental health issues, how do we embrace them. Are we still scared to love people with illnesses like AIDS, they have become the lepers of our day. What about drug dependants and the homeless, what about indigenous people and homosexuals how do we show love to the people despite the difficulties which come with their 'label'.

There is no one that Jesus would ignore, no one who would not have experienced the mothering love of God through Christ. How will we share the radical love of God and love like a mother does? This is God's challenge to us, how will we do it?  
Amen.