

Advertising media presents us with many images of the perfect or ideal family. You know the adverts that I'm talking about. We see filthy stained clothes sparkling when we use the right washing powder. We are presented with the ideal family life, always with the underlying subtext of "buy our product, and your life will be perfect". But frankly that's not real life.

Real life is actually about having the kids in the house from now till September. I know they only got out of school on Friday but cabin fever is setting in already. In

our house we actually **are** going to need toilet rolls reasonably soon, not because we are stacking them up, but because our son Nathan has now taken all of ours to use as indoor footballs. It seems there's some craze on YouTube at the minute of football stars doing kicky ups with them. Our Nathan was proud yesterday as he videoed himself doing 70 with the toilet roll. I can assure you that I will not be putting that toilet roll anywhere near me after what he has done with it.

And now the football has been seen in the bedroom and all

you can hear is the bounce
bounce bounce of a ball
everywhere.

And so we all have that stark
understanding that we all
might be stuck in our homes
for months now. Thank
goodness that in that real
madness is the grounding of
an incredible woman, my
Alison, who can in some
unbelievable way keep it all
surviving without us imploding.

And so in light of that reality, it
is probably both shocking and
paradoxically comforting to see
in our scripture reading a rich
tapestry of reality, where pain

and joy are both part and parcel of the normality of family life. Mothering involves times of pain and aching, bewildered confusion, misunderstanding and grief, as well as the times of joy and affection, laughter, and the delight in watching our children develop and mature. I have watched in the past week how Alison has taken the weight of worry upon her shoulders, making sure her children are washing hands at every opportunity, that they have hand sanitizer in their bags, and the worries keep going – all because of her love for her family.

The story of Mary and John at the foot of the cross is a strangely intimate scene. In caring for his mother and her continued well-being, Jesus entrusts her to the disciple he loved, that's John, and he asks him to care for her.

Why does he do this? Well, it's because his love for her runs deep, because he's the only one that truly knows the reality of what it has been to be a mother – the pain and worry that she has had to journey with. Mary suffered when she gave birth in a filthy stable, far from home. Mary suffered

when she heard that Herod wanted to kill her baby. Mary suffered when she was forced to become a refugee in Egypt. Mary suffered as she watched a whole nation misunderstand and taunt her son. And here, at the foot of the cross, Mary suffers again as she watches her beautiful boy being crucified for a crime he has not committed. Somehow that's not the scene we can sense from many stained glass windows. This is however the reality and anxiety of family. Jesus knew her agony and he was aware that, after his own death, there would be no one to care for his mother.

And so what we see is the real side of compassion. This is the side of compassion that I suspect Mary was willing to go for her son, in the same way as her son, the Son of God would go for her. This is the true side of the family of God – that whatever the case, love will always show through. Mothering Sunday, whilst mixed up today with the reality of no restaurant trips or lots of gatherings, is all about love.

And yet when we suffer in life we can concentrate on ourselves. Don't we see that so much today in our

supermarkets, scrambling and panicking, all for ourselves. Jesus didn't. Even in pain on the cross he is thinking of others. All those who he died for. But also two people in front of him. He asks Mary to adopt John as her son, and John to adopt Mary as his mother.

As people suffer as children of God, we are called to be family. Today we remember mothers and carers who love or loved us, and in many examples have given so much for us. But today in our community, more than ever, we have people out there who need to know they are cared

for. Can we use Mothering Sunday as a day to remember the need to care?

Paul writing to the church at Corinth states that in the body of Christ all the members should have "the same concern [or care] for one another. If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it; if one part is praised, all the other parts share its happiness" (1 Cor 12.25,26)

Today, Mothering Sunday, but in this strange place in the midst of a pandemic, we are called as family to care for one

another. With our text in mind, let's not forget that this means that we are called to care, for the sick, the bereaved, the young, the old, and those that have no family to help them in these days. Let us remember today how much we are loved, how much we think of women who have cared for us, and in return how can we show that love to those whom God loves in these difficult times across our country. That is the reality we face today, and we need to respond. Amen.