

Sunday 14th March 2021-Exodus 2:1-10- God Has Not Abandoned Us!

Today is a day when all of the church family normally gather, and we have the chance as children and adults to celebrate the women in our lives who have been there for us. As adults maybe today is a day when we celebrate and thank God for the women who have been in our lives who are maybe no longer alive. It is a real pity that we cannot be together to do that, and I really hope our young people today are looking after your mums and all the special women in your life today. I hope you take the chance to give them the little gift that we have prepared for you, and if you haven't got one yet please get in touch with your Sunday School teachers. So in the meantime, today is a day when we can thank God for different women, whether they are mums, grandmothers, aunts, step mums, foster mums, all kinds of women who have been so loving to us.

And I think the times we realise that women are so special in our lives is when something has happened to us and they are there for us, or times when we reflect back on what they have done for us. It doesn't even have to be a mother, even though today we celebrate Mother's Day. Today I thank God for my wife Alison and how she cares for all of us at home. I cannot imagine what chaos there would be without her, so from Josh, Nathan, myself and not forgetting Spud, we love you.

Sometimes it is only after a stage in our lives, maybe as we grow up, that we look back and reflect on the kindness and the goodness shown to us by our mothers. I certainly do that as I think today about my mum. There are however things in some of our lives where we have felt that our mums haven't been there for us. And so maybe today is a difficult day, but I hope in the short time that I am going to have with you now, whether you are a young person or whether you are an adult, you all know that God brings women into our lives to make us feel loved.

Our bible reading today is a very familiar one to all of us, and so you may think about switching off at this stage, but I believe today that God has something new to say to all of us through it. So just a little bit of background to our story. We all know that the Israelites were God's chosen people, and we know that through the story of Joseph and his amazing coat he was abandoned by his jealous brothers, sold and eventually arrives in Egypt. And in this story we know how powerful he becomes in Egypt, and that through his wisdom as a leader he stored up enough food to withstand the long 7 year period of famine that subsequently leads the Israelites towards Egypt for food.

But the country of Egypt becomes overrun with Israelites, and so Pharaoh the king at that time is clearly feeling very insecure about all this, and so he wishes to have their numbers reduced radically as well as working them into the ground through slavery. This all led to Pharaoh instructing that every Hebrew boy that was born must be thrown into the Nile so that the Israelites would reduce in number and the Egyptians would once again become the main population.

And so, this is where our story begins, with a difficult decision by Moses' mother Jochebed to leave her baby in a basket in the Nile river. The Nile is not a small stream that gently meanders through the countryside. This is a huge river with quite a flow on it, and a few crocodiles along the way to make it extremely dangerous. At first when you read these opening verses, it would be right to think that Moses' mother is abandoning him.

Have a think for a moment about what it feels like to be abandoned.

Do you remember that scene in the Christmas Movie Home Alone where the McCallister family are all getting ready to go on holiday to Paris, and somewhere in the busyness of packing up the car, they leave behind their youngest boy Kevin. They are already on the plane before they realise that he's at home, he's been abandoned by them, and they think to themselves that they are such bad parents. However Kevin on the other hand as he realises he's got the house to himself, lavishes in the idea that he can eat whatever he wants, he can watch whatever he wants, and he can go to bed whenever he wants – he's living the dream.

That is not the image that most of us have of feeling abandoned. Maybe for some of you, you have felt left out of things, or forgotten about. How does it make us feel when we are abandoned?

We might feel lonely, helpless, frightened, confused, and unloved.

Moses is just a baby so he won't know what's going on, and yet like any baby they have needs – they get hungry, they wee and poo, they need warmth, but more than anything they need the assurance of another person's comfort and love. So, it is not a surprise that in verse 6 we read that the baby was crying. Whilst Moses couldn't express it in words, he was definitely showing signs that he was feeling abandoned. And to top it all we read that after he was born, he was hidden for 3 months. Now many of you today, on Mother's Day will be thinking, what kind of mother hides their baby and then puts him in a basket down a river?

But it is through all these actions that we actually find out how much his mother really loved him. Did you notice in our reading that it says he was a fine child? Well actually that could be better translated meaning he was very special. You see Moses' mum could see that there was something special about how he would be used by God. She knew that God had an incredible plan for his life. And that is an incredibly special thing about mothers and women that care for us. They see things that maybe others cannot. I as a man might look at a baby and think they're cute and adorable, but God sees much more, and he places people with a role to see the potential of a child in the way that He sees them. He sees a destiny waiting to be fulfilled with the right love and care and direction. Today I believe that in every one of us, God has a destiny planned for our lives in the way that Moses had, but it takes for someone else to see that potential and to shape them.

Today there may be children across the UK who have for different reasons been abandoned, and it is through fostering or adoption agencies that hope, and love can be reintroduced into a child's life. I want you to watch however the incredible faith that a particular woman had for a little girl that she didn't know, and that through her love and her investment, she could see the incredible potential in the little girl. Whilst this next clip is a TV advert it shows us today that out there, there are people who will make sure that no child is left abandoned.

I am now going to talk to the adults for a moment. For every child that is in our care, they have an incredible potential ahead of them. And we here in this parish must do all we can to support mothers, foster mothers, step mothers, grandmothers in their rearing of our children so that they are shaped into what God has planned for their lives. Remember that old African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child”. All women today, whether you are able to have children of your own, or not, have a great opportunity to sow into children within our parish.

Jochabed realised the limitations of the care she could offer due to the danger that her son was under, and so she had to let her child go. But here was a woman who, we know, was acting in faith, so she was not abandoning her child in the hope that Moses would survive. No – this was an immense act of faith and trust in God on her part. She had recognised her child as a child of destiny and whilst it must have torn her heart out to leave him in the reeds, she did so knowing that God would watch over her precious child.

Boys and girls today know that you are so loved by many. And today thank God that there are women out there in your life that so want the best for you. And it’s my prayer today that those women who love you can see the huge opportunities and potential that is bursting within you, that God has planned for your lives, and that they through God’s guidance will help to shape you for what he wants to see in you.

So, let us pick up where we left off in our story about Moses.

Moses’ mother Jochabed had to make a very big decision – it would be the most difficult decision of her life. You might think that she made a stupid decision in letting go of her son, risking his life. But the biggest decision was this – she had to trust that God knew what he was doing, she had to let go of what she wanted and give it over to God.

Maybe you have been a mum or carer for a long time watching your children grow up. You’ve cared for them, provided for them, you’ve watched over them, and maybe you’ve been that mum as you have watched your child pick up their belongings and head off to University. I know that for my Alison, she is already not dealing well with the idea that as a mum she might have to let go of her big boy Josh in a year’s time if he decides to go away to Uni. It’s already had a few tears and we’re not even there yet. But letting go is tough. And I somehow think it is harder for a mother than it is a dad.

But we need to trust that God will watch over the children in our care and keep them safe. We need to let them go, in the care of God, and discover his destiny for their lives themselves.

As Jochabed let Moses go, she put him in a papyrus basket – and it was well sealed with tar to keep it water resistant, but ultimately she knew that it wouldn’t protect him forever. If we look at the Hebrew language that this story was written in, we find that the word used here for Moses’ basket is the same word used to describe Noah’s ark. Just as the ark would carry the people of God and the animals through the waters and bring them to safety to begin a new life, so Moses’ basket would carry him along the river, protecting him, so that he could grow into maturity and fulfil the plans that God had for him.

And that ultimately is what God is teaching us this morning for Mother's Day. There is nothing that will protect our children more than God's protection. Today we thank God for mothers who protect us but we all must have the courage and the faith to place our children in the ark or the basket or the protection of God even when the road ahead for them, post COVID looks so tough.

And can you see that God was faithful. Isn't it incredible how God would not only give Moses one mother, but he would then place him into the care of the daughter of Pharaoh, ironically the Pharaoh who was going about killing little Hebrew baby boys. And not only that but to then choose his real mum to care for him until it was time for Pharaoh's daughter to adopt him. In fact, women are so important in this whole story today; Jochebed, the Pharaoh's daughter and Miriam are all brave, courageous women, through whose actions God brings deliverance to his people. What may have looked like abandonment was an incredible rescue plan that God had created. And if we were to follow the story of Moses throughout the Book of Exodus, we would see the many ways in which God would never leave him or his people. In fact, as Moses dies and Joshua his successor takes over, here are the words which God promises to Joshua. He says "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous." (Joshua 1:5)

No matter our situation, God will always be there for us. Remember that. Today as you thank God for your mums and any other women that have been part of your life, consider that God has worked through them for his good and perfect plans so that you and I know that we are never abandoned. When my mum and I walked out of the home that I grew up in as a child, and as we walked away to start a new life from my dad who drank a lot, I wondered whether God had truly abandoned us. And here is what I learnt which I hope for some of you on this Mother's Day can be a strength:

1. Remember that God is ultimately in control.

Moses' mum had to recognise that there was nothing more that she could do but to trust. And in life there will be people, maybe family members who are going to let you down, but God never will. In Psalm 27 David recalled these words, "Even if my father and mother abandon me, the LORD will hold me close". Remember that if he is able to hold all the stars perfectly in the sky, he will see you through whatever the challenge is that you face.

2. God has directed women to show his love and care towards you.

Throughout the bible we see women who have been instrumental in shaping others. Why don't you look up some of them? For example, Hannah prayed to God that she would have a son. His name was Samuel, and she promised that she would dedicate his life to God. Esther was a beautiful woman who through prayer and bravery saved her people from death. Priscilla provided great support to the missionary Paul and was known for her powerful ministry and generosity to those in need. Jehosheba who was the daughter of King Joram saved her nephew Joash from being massacred by the Queen Mother therefore preserving the line of David. And so, the list goes on.

For me I remember an elderly woman in the church I grew up in who told my mum that she prayed for me daily. So be encouraged that there are women that God has placed to care for you in life. Adults, maybe today God is calling you to be that woman who prays for young people, or maybe he is calling you towards fostering or adoption to bring hope into a young person's life.

3. God has a destiny planned for your life.

If today you feel that your earthly mum has let you down, then remember that she is human after all. But that cannot define your future. God however has a perfect plan for your life, and he will place people in your life to shape your future. He has every good intention for your life. And so here's some encouraging words for you today from Ephesians 1:4-5, "Long ago, even before he made the world, God chose us to be his very own through what Christ would do for us; he decided then to make us holy in his eyes, without a single fault—we who stand before him covered with his love." If today your mum and other women have been a positive influence in where you are now, then make sure to let her know that today; pray today giving thanks to God for how she has shaped you.

So today, we celebrate mothers for what they are doing in showing love through the rearing of children but also for what they are achieving in fulfilling God's destiny for this community and potentially the wider world. For all you women listening, be excited with how the children around us have a plan from God that we can be a part of shaping. We celebrate mothers, we thank God for our children, and we anticipate the raising of a new generation of faithful Christians: filled with hope for the future. Remember, God has not abandoned them.

Amen.