

03.15 - CCV - Mothering Sunday Sermon

1 Samuel 1:20–end; John 19:25b–27

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight oh lord our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Dear Friends,

There are moments in the Scriptures when the love of a mother becomes a window through which we glimpse the mystery of God. Mothering Sunday invites us to stand quietly before such moments. Today's readings bring us to two scenes: one at the beginning of a life, and one at the end of a life. One takes place in the quiet hope of the temple at Shiloh; the other beneath the terrible shadow of the cross.

In the first reading, we meet Hannah. In the Gospel, we stand beside Mary at the crucifixion. Between these two women stretches a profound spiritual thread — the thread of love that gives life, and the love that must learn to let go.

Hannah's story begins in longing. For years she had prayed for a child. In the ancient world, childlessness carried not only personal grief but social shame. Her sorrow was so deep that when she prayed in the temple, the priest Eli thought she was drunk. Yet her prayer was not one of bitterness; it was a prayer of surrender.

She promised God that if a son were given to her, she would give that child back to God.

And when Samuel was born, Hannah did something extraordinary. Once he was weaned — still very young — she brought him to the temple and entrusted him to the service of the Lord.

We can easily pass over this moment too quickly. But imagine what it meant. The child she had prayed for through tears, the child whose birth healed years of sorrow — she brings him to the temple and leaves him there.

It is an act that reveals something profound about love. True love does not possess. True love releases.

Hannah does not cling to Samuel as something that belongs to her. She recognises that this life was always a gift from God. Her motherhood becomes an act of offering.

And so she says:

“For this child I prayed; and the Lord has granted me the petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he is given to the Lord.”

The language is beautiful: she has “lent” him to the Lord. The life she received as gift she now returns in trust.

Motherhood, in this sense, becomes a participation in God’s own creative love: receiving, nurturing, and ultimately entrusting life to God’s purposes.

And then our Gospel reading takes us to another mother.

But now the scene is very different.

We are no longer at the joyful beginning of a child’s life. Instead we stand at the cross. The child Mary once held in her arms now hangs dying before her.

The Gospel tells us simply: “Standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother...”

The word “standing” is important. Mary does not collapse in despair. She stands. It is the posture of courage, of faith, of silent fidelity.

And here, at the hour of his death, Jesus speaks to her.

“Woman, here is your son.”

Then he says to the beloved disciple:

“Here is your mother.”

At first this might sound simply like an act of practical care. A dying son ensuring that his mother will not be alone.

But something deeper is happening.

At the very moment when Jesus' life is being poured out for the world, a new family is being formed. The bonds of blood are widened into the bonds of grace. The disciple becomes a son; Mary becomes a mother not only to Jesus but, in a mysterious way, to the community of believers.

At the foot of the cross, the Church is being born.

And so Mothering Sunday leads us to recognise something larger than biological motherhood. It points us toward a spiritual reality: the Church herself becomes a mother.

Just as Hannah gave Samuel to God's service, just as Mary gave her Son to the world's salvation, so the Church is called to nurture life, to form disciples, and ultimately to entrust them to God.

Motherhood in Scripture is never simply about possession. It is about vocation.

It is about nurturing life in such a way that life becomes free to serve God's purposes.

And this truth speaks not only to mothers, but to all of us.

Every form of love — whether parental, pastoral, or communal — faces the same spiritual challenge: the temptation to hold on, to control, to possess.

But the Gospel teaches us a different path.

Love must learn the courage of letting go.

Hannah lets Samuel go to the temple. Mary lets Jesus go to the cross. And even Jesus himself lets go of his life into the hands of the Father.

“Into your hands I commend my spirit.”

This pattern — receiving, nurturing, and releasing — lies at the heart of Christian love.

And perhaps that is why Mothering Sunday can be both joyful and tender. For some, it is a day of gratitude for the love of mothers and grandmothers. For others, it may carry memories of loss, distance, or longing.

Yet the Scriptures remind us that motherhood is ultimately rooted in God's own love.

The prophet Isaiah once speaks of God with striking tenderness:

“As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you.”

The love we experience through human mothers — imperfect yet real — is a reflection of something deeper: the faithful, nurturing, patient love of God.

God is the one who gives life.

God is the one who sustains life.

And God is the one into whose hands every life is finally entrusted.

So today we give thanks.

We give thanks for mothers who nurtured us, protected us, prayed for us, and guided us. We give thanks for those who showed us something of God's gentleness and strength.

But we also recognise that the calling to nurture life is shared by the whole Christian community.

A church becomes a true spiritual home when it reflects the qualities we see in Hannah and Mary: faithfulness, sacrifice, courage, and trust.

A church becomes a mother when it nurtures faith in the young, encourages the searching, comforts the wounded, and sends people into the world to serve God.

In other words, the Church mothers the world.

And so the final image we hold today is not only Hannah in the temple or Mary at the cross.

It is the quiet, enduring love that continues through generations — the love that prays for children long after they are grown, the love that blesses even when it must release, the love that trusts God with the future.

Hannah entrusted Samuel to God.

Mary entrusted Jesus to the Father.

And God, in turn, entrusted the world to the love revealed in Christ.

May we learn that same trust.

May we learn that same courage.

And may the love that nurtures, sustains, and releases life continue to grow among us — until all of us are gathered into the eternal home of God, where every tear is wiped away, and every longing finds its fulfilment.

Amen.