

Sermon - Mothering Sunday (1 Samuel 1:20–28; Luke 2:33–35)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

It's quite normal that on Mothering Sunday, we gather with mixed hearts, mixed emotions. Some of us come with gratitude and joy, remembering love freely given. Some of us come with grief, longing, or complicated memories. Some are mothers, some are not; some are nurturers in quiet, unseen ways. Yet today, the Church invites us to celebrate *mothering* in its broadest sense of being the tender, courageous, sacrificial love that reflects the heart of God.

Our readings give us two mothers: Hannah and Mary. Hannah rejoices in a long-awaited child while Mary stands in awe and unease as Simeon's prophecy casts a shadow over her joy. Together, Hannah and Mary show us that mothering love is both gift and cost, blessing and surrender.

In our first reading, Hannah's story has reached its turning point. After years of barrenness and prayer, she holds the child she had only dared to hope for. She named her precious son, Samuel meaning "I have asked him of the Lord." Imagine her joy as she felt the warmth of his tiny hand, and the laughter she once thought she might never experience because her childlessness.

And then she does something extraordinary. She brings him to the temple and gives him back to God. This is not abandonment but trust. Hannah does not give Samuel away because she loves him less, but because she loves him so deeply that she refuses to hold him tighter than God does. Her actions express her thought: *This child is not mine to possess; he is a gift entrusted to me.*

Mothering love, at its holiest, is never ownership. It is stewardship. Whether we raise children, care for others, teach, guide, or protect — love means holding with open hands.

If Hannah's story is about surrender born from answered prayer, Mary's story is about surrender born from mystery.

A few weeks ago, we celebrated Candlemass and read the gospel narrative that contains today's scripture reading from Luke. In the temple, Simeon blesses the infant Jesus. He speaks words of promise, of salvation, light, glory. But then he turns to Mary and says something startling: *"A sword will pierce your own soul too."*

Here is the truth of mothering love: joy and vulnerability are inseparable. To love deeply is to risk heartbreak. Mary does not yet know the full meaning of Simeon's words, but we do. We know where her journey leads to, that it leads to misunderstanding, loss, and the foot of a cross.

But Mary does not turn away. She treasures Simeon's words in her heart and she continues walking the path laid before her. Love does not demand certainty before it says yes. It trusts even when it trembles.

Both Hannah and Mary remind us that real love is costly. Hannah lets go of the child she prayed for. Mary holds in her arms the child who will one day break her heart.

Mothering love, be it biological or spiritual, it's never tidy. It means sleepless nights, anxious prayers, quiet sacrifices no one sees. It means pouring yourself out without guarantees. And yet, this is the love that most closely mirrors God.

For Scripture tells us again and again that God's love is not distant or detached. It is fierce, tender and vulnerable. God gathers us like a mother hen gathers her chicks. God refuses to let us go, even when love leads to the cross.

On Mothering Sunday, we widen our lens. We honour mothers, but we also honour grandmothers, godmothers, foster carers, teachers, mentors, friends, and those who quietly nurture faith in others. We honour those who mother through presence, prayer, and persistence.

Some here today may feel unseen – those who longed to mother and could not, those whose children are far away, those whose relationships carry pain. The stories of Hannah and Mary speak here too. God hears the silent prayers of Hannah and sees her. He stays near the pierced heart of Mary.

Today is Mothering Sunday. It is also the fourth Sunday in Lent. If today carries grief for you, know this: God meets you not outside your sorrow, but within it.

Our two Scripture readings invite us into a deeper question: *What has God entrusted to us? And can we release it back into God's hands?* It may be children growing into independence. It may be people we cannot protect forever. It may be dreams that did not unfold as we hoped. Mothering love teaches us a spiritual truth that love matures when it learns to let go. We do so not because we stop caring, but because we trust that God's love holds what ours cannot. Hannah places Samuel in the temple. Mary places Jesus in the world. And God holds them both.

Today we are invited to three gentle movements of the heart. The first, is to give thanks for those who have mothered us, whether for a lifetime or for a season. Write their names on your heart today and bless them.

Second, let's notice those for whom this day is heavy. A kind word, a quiet prayer, a listening ear — these are sacred acts.

And third, we open our hands before God, and say, *"All that I love, I place in your care."*

Mothering Sunday points beyond any human mother to the heart of God. For every mother who has loved imperfectly, God loves perfectly. For every loss, God gathers. For every wound, God holds.

The love we celebrate today is not just human love at its best. It's a glimpse of divine love made visible. A love that births hope, that carries sorrow and a love that never lets us go.

So today, we honour Hannah's trust and Mary's courage. And we honour all who mother in ways seen and unseen. Let's us rest in the promise that the God who entrusted children to Hannah and Mary is the same God who entrusts love to us. And the same God who received their surrender receives ours. May we have the grace to love deeply, the courage to let love cost us, and the faith to place all we hold dear into the hands of God.

Let me close with a prayer:

Loving God,

We thank you for all who have mothered us in love and faith.

Comfort those who carry sorrow today.

Strengthen those who nurture others.

Teach us to love with open hands and trusting hearts,

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.