

Year A Lent 4 Mothering Sunday 15th March 2026

Samuel 1: 20-28. Colossians 3: 12-17. John 19: 25-27.

Defiant Mothering

How can I speak of the loving acts of mothering that we can all do, when the news reports are full of white men bragging about how they can obliterate the people of another nation?

How can I speak of the loving acts of mothering that we can all do, when there are pictures of the site of a girls school in Tehran flattened by, in all probability¹, an American missile, and the sights and sounds of women wailing as they pick through the rubble finding body parts of innocent girls?

How can I speak of the loving acts of mothering that we can all do, when, through contacts in Lebanon, I am aware that families are seeking financial and logistical support to flee Southern Lebanon and the suburbs of Beirut for the comparative safety of Tripoli further north, whilst overwhelming Israeli air and ground forces bomb neighbourhoods and civil structures?

In all of these situations, we can feel powerless. We can feel hopeless. We can feel that nothing we say or do can make a difference. And when might we feel brave enough to speak out ourselves, about the injustices we see or perhaps experience? And yet, we are all called to help 'mother' this earth and all of God's creation. If only we look we can see the power of mothering at work, in history, in other places, and in our own back yard.

In Chile, during the vile Pinochet-led dictatorship from 1973 to 1990, women created novel ways to dissent and protest. They used traditional embroidery, creating tapestries – called 'Arpilleras' – depicting repression, demanding truth and justice, and went on to form the Association of the Detained-Disappeared - Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos. Their patient and dignified protests influenced the workings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission formed with the return to democratic rule.

¹ Bellingcat are certain it was an American Tomahawk missile.

Bishop Marion Budde of the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. feels called to continue her ministry of speaking truth to power. She said that she can't be cowed by the threats as it would go against everything she stands for. That is a form of strong, defiant mothering, knowing the possible cost, but doing it anyway. She is mothering so many people – people she has no real connection with, are most likely not Episcopalian or even Christian, but that doesn't matter.²

The text from a contact in Lebanon was met with deep care by complete strangers who have enabled this family of 30 members to travel to Tripoli and rent rooms and afford to buy at least some basic food stuffs. All of these strangers are mothering vulnerable people -people just like you and me who wish to live in peace and survive a military onslaught.

In our readings today we get glimpses of various types of mothering.

Hannah had promised her first born would be dedicated to the Lord, and named him Samuel. This was after she prayed to God to become pregnant, because she was barren. I cannot conceive of how desperately she must have wanted a child, and then being able to give that gift of life over to God's service. There is a strength and depth of faith in that act of mothering. Hannah went on to have five more children.

In our gospel reading we have one of the most heart-rending scenes, described by the writer of John's gospel. He depicts the scene of Jesus' mother watching him die, alongside Mary's sister who is unnamed, Mary wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene. There are various aspects of mothering in this short scene. Mary, mother of God, is alongside her Son in his suffering. And remarkably, Mary's sister and the other two Marys present are mothering Jesus' mother, being alongside her in her distress. And then we have Jesus, mothering and caring for his mother, making sure she will be cared for by allocating John as her 'son' and Mary as John's mother.

Paul's letter to the Colossians describes the values and actions of someone who is following the ways of Jesus, which can be viewed as mothering attributes:

² Bishop Mariann Budde has written a book called 'How we learn to be brave: decisive moments in life and faith. I have started reading it, and from the first two chapters, I can recommend it. ISBN 978-1-788932806.

clothed with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive each other. Above clothe yourself with love and let the peace of Christ rule your hearts.

I started this sermon with asking rhetorically, how can I speak of loving acts of mothering?

Given these readings today, letting them abide within us for a while, I think the question becomes, 'how can I **not** speak of loving acts of mothering?' Hannah, Jesus, Mary the mother of God, Mary's sister, Mary wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene have shown us a way, and our news headlines are an urgent reminder how much the world needs people to be expert and incessant mothers. Male and female, old and young, Jew and Greek, can all mother others and situations. We need a deep well of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. We need to forgive others and cloth ourselves with love and let the peace of Christ rule our hearts.

And if you need any more inspiration, go and buy yourselves Bishop Mariann Budde's book, read it, share it, discuss it together. And share what other books of spiritual inspiration have helped you, or what ways you have that give you the strength to mother in aspects of your life.

Our hope is not fluffy optimism. Our hope is in going out into the world, and playing our part to mother this incredibly broken world, wherever we are, whenever we can, however we can.