

Happy Mother's Day - May 7th, 2023

John, Brendan and I went out to a movie a couple or three weeks ago. It is a rarity that we find a movie that the three of us might like. It was an interesting movie because it was about the importance of family but in the end the movie recognized that step mothers, official or unofficial, can play a very important part of the family. That got me thinking about mothers in the Bible. Many of them face many different situations and all are honoured by God.

So I am going to highlight some stories where mothers play a key role in the Biblical accounts and we shall see what we can learn from these various situations.

Let's first look at the story of Moses. The beginning part of Moses' life is a very short story in the Bible but it has such vivid imagery that we can all see Moses floating down the river in his little reed basket boat made by his mother. This is the odd story where the female characters stand out for their lack of names. In another place we find Moses' mother's name is Jochebed and his sister is Miriam and his brother is Aaron. At this time the chosen people of God - who would later take on the name of Jews but this is too early for that title - are slaves in Egypt during the time of the Pharaohs. The pharaoh of the day has decided that there are too many slaves and he devises a plan to shrink it. He decrees that male babies will not be allowed live. However, we see in this story that if you can get your baby to the river and if Pharaoh's daughter sees the baby there is a good chance of the baby living. She knows that it is a Hebrew baby as God's chosen people were called at that time and she is more than willing to take care of it. Little does she realize that she gives Moses back to his sister who takes him to their mother to care for him until he is older. I had always thought of Moses as being the lucky one that was rescued but I noted this week that he had a brother Aaron who plays a key role with Moses in later stories. With the help of God, the midwives of Moses day seemed to have found many ways to keep their children alive. God was with the women in this awkward situation and Moses becomes a very important person because he is both Hebrew and Egyptian. God knows about the mothers who gave up their children because of political situations. God also knows and cares for those children who were raised by very different parents.

Let's go back to the story of Abraham. Abraham has a wife named Sarah who is childless. So Sarah chooses one of her slaves named Hagar to carry a child so that there will be an heir in the family. Hagar has a son named Ishmael. Abraham is happy with his son. Sarah is happy with her son - until she has her own son named Isaac. Sarah wants to make sure that Isaac is the one that gets Abraham's blessing and inheritance. She does not want Ishmael to receive it even though the blessing has been promised to Isaac by God. Sarah takes steps to make sure that Hagar leaves with her son. Abraham may be a righteous person but that does not always mean that he does the right thing. To make Sarah happy, he sends Hagar out into the wilderness, just her and her very young son, with enough food and water for a day. Basically, Abraham was leaving the fate of Hagar and her child up to God. God hears Hagar's cry for help. She finds a community of people where she and her

child can live. This story of Hagar and her baby became a very important story of hope for African American slave women, as you might imagine. The Bible had a story about a slave woman with very limited choices about how to keep her son alive. It is also a story about God blessing Abraham and Sarah in spite of the way that they treated Hagar. They were chosen to be the parents of God's chosen people. Apparently, they were chosen because they worshiped God and they were very human.

So let's move on to the next generation of this family. Isaac marries Rebecca and they have twin boys named Jacob and Esau. This story tells us about Isaac who loved his son, Esau and Rebecca who loved her son, Jacob. From this choosing of one twin over the other, there is the story where Jacob steals the birthright and ends up running from his father and brother for years. He finds out in the end that his brother has ceased to chase him years ago and God had blessed him with a large family and many animals. Though Jacob spent many years living in fear because his mother wanted him to take Esau's birthright, he did not need to. Both twins were blessed by God. So I see this story telling us that God knows that as parents we sometimes find ourselves loving one child more than the other. It is true is it not? I hate to admit it but in my hating to admit it, I am sure my sons could tell you which of them I loved more at different times. I also take heart from this story that neither son lost his relationship or blessing from God because of what their parents did. This is good to know. Also for those of you who might have known that you were not the favourite of your parents, God knows about this situation. There is a long history of this happening. God is the perfect parent. He does not need to choose or better yet, God chooses each one of us equally and uniquely.

Some of you will know the story of Ruth and Naomi in the book of Ruth. Highlights if you don't. Naomi and her husband move to a different with a different group of people because there was a famine in their area. They moved where there would be more food for their family. They stayed and raised two sons who married two women of the community. Naomi's husband dies and then her sons die. We do not know why. It just happened. When we meet Naomi in this story, she is at a loss in what to do. She is grieving and feels lonely so she decides that she will move back home to be with her extended family. The two daughters-in-law begin the journey with her but Naomi eventually tells them to go back to their own community. There will be nothing for them in her community. She will journey on her own. Orpah decides to return but Ruth does not let her mother-in-law travel alone and move back to a community that she has not been for the better part of twenty years. Ruth stays and watches over Naomi. It takes some time before Naomi realizes all that Ruth has done for her but by the end she does praise God for this woman who would not leave her. I find this an encouraging story. Often the focus is on Ruth and Boaz but there is a great deal about Naomi as well. I think this story shows God's care people like Naomi. God did not let her be alone in her grief and despair no matter how much she tried. God looked after Naomi who had lost so much that was her life - and restored her to a place where she was able to rejoice over her grandchildren and love life again.

Lastly, we will look at Matthew 20:20. The mother of Zebedee's two sons, whose name

we know from other references is Salome, comes to Jesus with a request. A favour. “Grant that one of my two sons may sit on right and the other on your left in your new kingdom.” This is a woman who has been listening to all that is going on. She has heard the stories from Jesus about a new kingdom being created. She wants to make sure that her sons are part of it. In fact, she wants to make sure that they are in the top two positions of power at the right and left of Jesus. I have no idea what her two adult sons think of this great request. I know what my adult sons would think if I decided to do something like this if they were in a group of disciples. They would be embarrassed. They would point out that they would have to go back and be part of this group again. It would be awkward after the mother meddling! And so it was for James and John. Yet, I like this story because Jesus does not belittle Salome for her request. He accepts this concern and desire to help her sons further their careers. He does however point out that she, and her sons, have no idea what they are asking. God’s kingdom of kinship is nothing like the kingdoms that they know. Still, it is nice to know that when we are ambitious for our children that God knows about this desire even if it is often wrong headed - maybe even unnecessary. We do not need to try and hide it. We can give it to God and I expect that God will help us channel that ambition appropriately.

A mother’s love. Strange and wonderful, imperfect and oh, so necessary. These are Biblical mothers in all of their glory and humility. Or maybe just in all of their humanity. Loved and chosen by God. Just as we are loved and chosen by God to play our role in the story of the triune God with us. God is well aware of the ups and downs and frustrations of life and He has covenanted to be with us in all of this. So Happy Mother’s Day. Know that God is with you as you remember your mother today and as you continue to parent those who have been given to you. Amen

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of life, we praise you this day for the gift of your creation as new life rises around us in lower beds and farmers’ fields, in the nests and burrows of your creatures.

We praise you for the gift of our lives, and for all those people – from our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents to our teachers and coaches and good friends – who have encouraged us along the way.

In this time of worship, encourage us in the present moments of our lives, challenging as they may seem. Refresh us with the new life you promise us in Christ Jesus in whose name we praise you as the Spirit prays within us.

God of love, we are grateful for the love you bless us with in our homes and families. Yet you know family life is not always easy. Our love for each another gets strained some days. Forgive us if we have taken our family for granted. Give us grace to repair relationships where strain is showing. Continue to teach us to pray as you taught your

disciples saying - Our Father....

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

God of homes and families, this Sunday we give you thanks for our families, especially remembering mothers, grandmothers, great grandmothers. We are grateful for their love and attention, their hard work and the deep hope they have cherished for each one of us. We honour before you each one who has mothered us and now lives with you in your eternal care.

And we ask your blessing on each one in our family who continues to care for us, cook for us and worry about us.

God with a loving heart, Hear our prayer.

God of connections and compassion, today we thank you for our friends and relations, for the neighbours and fellow citizens who help to make our lives complete. We thank you for glad times shared, helping hands offered, commitments honoured. And we pray for those around us facing particular challenges this day:

God with a loving heart, Hear our prayer.

God of courage and new possibility, today we pray for all those who feel life or love slipping through their fingers, for those who face the loss of good health, and for those who face the loss of good times.

We pray for communities facing upheaval through natural disaster and human misjudgement, and for countries facing economic turbulence and environmental collapse

God with a loving heart, Hear our prayer.

God of forgiveness and renewal, today we pray for those caught up in relationships in need of repair and for all who seek peace and seek to make peace.

We pray for families, churches, communities and countries caught up in division. Send your Spirit to bring peace to troubled lives.

God with a loving heart, Hear our prayer.

We pray this in Jesus' name Amen