

Mothering Sunday 2021: John 19:25b-27

'And from that hour, the disciple took her into his own home' John 19v27

Read *A son's trip home*.

A son's trip
home
still making the heart hot
as the tiny singe
of ginger
on my
tongue's tip
while you
were baking

I wrote that short scrap of a poem many years ago when both my parents were still alive and lived in a familiar home, with its evocative smells and sounds: a familiar creak on the stair or the closing of a kitchen door. The drive across from Cambridge where I was living then, to Hereford, where they were, was always tinged with that same tight mix of emotions – love, yes, but also a kind of awkwardness and regret that only families can instill.

'Home' is one of the most powerful words in the English language. Words can't do justice to it... (Try?). It's powerful because it triggers in almost everyone a sense of longing, either for what was our home in the past, or for a home we hope for in the future. In fact, in the Christian faith, the two are very closely linked, because the Bible speaks about our heading for a heavenly home that will finally resolve that deep aching in our hearts that so often finds us looking back in time. The Christian is, in this life at least, always heading home.

Home not only reminds us of warm and glad memories, but also painful ones: we can't help also recalling what wasn't right or isn't right in our home life, which is made all the more painful by the expectation that it ought to be the one place we do think of fondly. For many households, the pains of 'home' have been exacerbated – either from being somewhat kettled together with other members of the household, or the agony of missing supportive family company.

And so important, then, that we hear the words from our reading this morning, which speaks of a new home being made in the midst of tragedy. These few, spare verses, only hint at the awfulness of the situation: Mary, stood beneath the cross of her son, bereft – and John, Jesus' great friend, the only disciple, so far as we can tell, who stayed with him during the crucifixion; and the Lord's dying attention to his mother's grief that gave one to the other. *Read vv26-7 again*. We don't know what had happened to Joseph by this time: we can only assume he was either dead or departed.

Whatever the circumstances, we see the mix and mess of family life at the foot of the cross, the central event of our faith: and Jesus' compassion for it. And we see the possibility of a new home being formed at that place. Of brokenness finding new belonging; of grief finding a home. The simple beauty of that phrase *And from that hour, the disciple took her into his own home* demonstrates how the generosity and self-sacrifice we associate with motherhood; the hospitality, the ability to bear pain and make room for another. These qualities we admire are possible for all of us; men too.

And as we give thanks for our own mothers today, and recall our home life past and present: we are likewise called to consider the church as a place of motherly love – and to think how in this new season of church life, these qualities might characterize our common life, just as they also flow from the character of God, who invites all to find their belonging in him.

In Jesus' name. Amen.