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Sermon for mothering sunday 2015

Preach: Sunday March 15, 2015 Lent 4 / Mothering Sunday Jonathan Kerry, Diocesan Secretary and Cathedral Administrator Jesus father and mother were amazed by what they say about him. - Luke 2.33 I'm surprised to be here! No, seriously, I shouldn't be here this morning. I'm not talking about some mix in the Cathedral diary, or the discrepancy in my credentials as a preacher (though I might come to ask about it), but right now, I should be on a train, heading south. You see, almost two years ago, I made plans to go on vacation today. Specifically, today I was meant to join a cruise ship in Southampton for two weeks, sailing up from the Faroe Islands north of Scotland to be in the best position, next Friday morning, to see the total solar eclipse. But after you can see, my plans have changed - and here I am. And on Friday, I'll have to deal with the partial eclipse that, provided there is no cloud, we'll see here in Leicester about nine and a half in the morning - catch it if you can! Of course, the reason for changing the plan, for my surprise to be here this morning, is the result of another surprise. A surprise that started two and a half years ago, which for me started one afternoon when the then dean, Viv Faull, ran into my office in a state of great emotion. They found Richard! she said. Who's Richard? I thought, and I didn't know it was lost! Then the penny fell. And the rest is history. And in seven days, seven hours from now, Richard, or at least his remains, will be here in this Cathedral – something no one really had to wait for until that September afternoon. So my vacation was canceled, and here I am - surprise! Of course, I should be used to surprises, to a name like mine. After noticing A.A. Milne: Jonathan Jo has a mouth like an O and a wheelbarrow full of surprises. For Pharaoh's daughter, it was not a wheelbarrow, but a basket of papyrus that took place a surprise for her - the child, later to be called Moses, who was left among the reeds on the river bank. Now, to understand this story, we need to consider what is written a few verses earlier, at the end of chapter one of Exodus. Pharaoh was afraid of the increase in the number of Hebrew immigrant population - far from being an ethnic minority, they became the ethnic majority and, to combat this, he ordered all Hebrew male children to be killed. This is why Moses' mother hid it first, then put it in the thatched basket—not to abandon the child, but to see if, by some means, it could be saved. The pharaoh's daughter, conspiring with her mother, even though she didn't realize she was his mother, was against her father's orders, an act courageous compassion and defiance. And the story ends with a Moses' name: I pulled him out of the water. We cannot fail to notice this foreshadows the subsequent salvation of the Jews, led by Moses, from the water of the Red Sea, and we are probably also heading to our own baptism, in which through water we are bound by God's saving grace in Jesus Christ. So, on this maternal Sunday, we have two examples of courageous motherhood—the natural mother of Moses, who took brave and ingenious steps to save her son's life, and the daughter of Pharaoh, who became the adoptive mother of Moses, who defied the brutality of her father's regime to ensure that the child grew up, ironically to become the unmesis of the Pharaoh. And she's probably Pharaoh's daughter whose actions are the biggest surprise - Moses' mother, in fact, had nothing to lose, while she risked everything for this stranger's child. Reading our gospel, three short verses from the account of Jesus' presentation in the Temple, tells us that his parents were surprised: Jesus' father and mother were amazed by what was said about him. Simeon has just said that this child will be a light for revelation for the Gentiles and for the glory for (God) the people of Israel. Now, most parents are ambitious for their offspring, but a prediction like that caps them all! But before Joseph and Mary can become too euphoric about the prospect of their son obtaining such an international significance, Simeon goes on to tell Mary, interestingly, only to the mother, this child is destined for the fall and ascension of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will resist, so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your soul as well. Not such a happy prospect after all! So what can we pull out of all this for ourselves on this day? Well, first of all we can observe that although, fortunately, few parents of us have faced extreme circumstances, would be Moses' mother in an attempt to protect our children from evil, however, every day, mothers, and fathers, take great care for the well-being of their offspring, do everything they can to protect them from danger and lay the foundations for a happy and fulfilled future. And that this is as true for the parents of those who continue to become significant figures in the history of the world as for everyone else. Also, that there are those who, although not the parents themselves, however, will do everything they can to take care of the safety and well-being of vulnerable children, sometimes at the cost of their own. And that parent is a risky business. We can never be quite sure the children will prove - popular, successful, or offended, a tragic life. They will surprise us - and admit, in most cases brings us both joy and sadness to But while that's what you can usually say about parents for the generality of those of us living in relatively established, established, times, not far away there is something much tougher. As much as we empathize with Moses' mother, Pharaoh's daughter, and Mary, let us not sanitize the stories so as to provide only a unchallenged validation of daffodils, chocolates, and teddy bears on Mother's Day. We live in a world where the parent, especially motherhood, is still for far too many a way from chocolates and flowers. If too many women die at birth, too many children die in childhood, too many families live in poverty or under threat of criminal regimes. There are bad parents and there are children who turn against everything their parents hoped for and worked for, which pierces the souls of their parents. And let's not fool ourselves that the pain is not near us, among us here this morning. Let us not be surprised that stories that do not resemble those in today's biblical readings are being played, right now, even here, in this congregation. Now I say this not because I want to be melodramatic, or to put a damper on procedures, but because I want to scan something out of what's going on here, so we gather for worship, and especially as we come to celebrate the Eucharist. Celebrate - that's an interesting word, isn't it? When I Googled it, I was given the definition: publicly recognize (a meaningful or happy day or event) with a social gathering or a pleasant activity. I'm sure a lot of people will celebrate Mothering

Sunday (or Mother's Day) just like that. Enjoy! But to celebrate the Eucharist - maybe we didn't describe what we do in the same way. Because at the heart of it, we remember betrayal, disillusionment, condemnation, agonizing death – a sword that pierces the body of a man and the soul of a mother. And, of course, this is true every time in the Eucharist. Every time we eat this bread and drink this cup we proclaim the death of the Lord... But, of course, it is rightly called a celebration—a happy day or event, even a pleasant activity—because we believe that by entering into this act of remembering Christ's death, we also enter into his life of resurrection. Blessed are those called to his dinner! In the Eucharist our joys and sorrows and the joys and sufferings of the world are gathered at the cross and transformed with the hope of resurrection. So we can, and must hold together today, Maternal Sunday, the joy and happiness and pain and pain of mothers, fathers, all who care for children—and allow all this to be transformed at the table of Christ through the hope of resurrection. For so Christ's sufferings are abundant for us, so our consolation is abundant through Christ, according to St. Paul. That's pretty amazing, pretty surprising! Much, much more amazing, even the remains of Richard III in the Greyfriars parking lot. Although our hope is that the events of the next two weeks will give us the opportunity to link this surprise to the surprising message of the gospel that Christians discover in the Eucharist. And before that, if you get the chance, look at the sky Friday morning. It's the last eclipse in Europe by 2026 and if you've never seen one, you'll be amazed. Although probably not as much as those cruise passengers I hoped to be among, not of course, that I'm complaining about how things turned out. Well, not too much! Amen. © Jonathan Kerry Luke 2: 21-35 Maternity is something most people need to grow in. It's a paved road with all kinds of good intentions... many of that get thrown out the window the first time that your little beloved child comes back to you and says No... I won't!. Motherhood - and for that matter fatherhood - kind of creeps on us. Here are five signs that conclusively prove that you have become a mother - which I found on the internet: 1. Start spending half an hour regularly in the bathroom ... just to be alone! 2. You start to hope that tomato ketchup is a vegetable, because it is the only one that your child eats. 3. You will find that without thinking about it, you've cut crusts of your husband's sandwiches 4. You hear your mother's voice coming out of your mouth when you say NO in the best clothes! And finally... the most telling sign of all... 5. Use your own spit to clean your child's face. Reading the gospel this morning invites us to think of something from both the joy and the pain of motherhood. When Mary and Joseph introduced their new son Jesus to the Temple to the Lord, Simeon prophesied over the child—whom he recognized by divine light as the promised Messiah. And his prophecy contained a few strange words—topsy turvey words: This child is destined to cause the rise and fall of many in Israel... (Luke 2:34) Mary has adhered to this perspective. It was a real joy in the gift of motherhood that was given to him, because he saw something of the potential of the child he gave birth to. But there is a darker edge of Simeon's prophecy. At the end of his promises, there is a dark feeling in his final line: And a sword will pierce your soul too (Lc 2:35). Simeon knows his Scriptures. He knows, for example, that Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would have to die to achieve his ultimate goal of saving Israel. He knows that the path Jesus must follow goes to a difficult one. What Mary does not yet know, at this moment is that she will find herself at the foot of her son's cross - watching him die, being deserted by all the crowds, and all the adhering, John expects. So - from the example and story we will see that both joy and are inevitable, normal aspects of what it means to be a mother. There's something else in Mary's story that should give us pause for thought. Like most mothers in her day, Maria worked her joy and pain as a mother in the community. Mary had her cousin, Elizabeth, to support her in the early stages of her pregnancy. At the birth of Jesus, she had the company of Joseph, the shepherds, and the wise men. In the story I have just read, Mary and Joseph present Jesus to the priests of the temple so that through his circumcision he can be received in the community of faith. During the visit to Jerusalem, when Jesus is lost, the family travels with many pilgrims. Even at the end of Jesus' life, Mary has the support of Mary Magdalene, and John. Motherhood is never something that should be done in isolation. As a church, we have a duty to support mothers in the joyful, painful, testing, glorious call of motherhood. Within this parish we allow a lot of different ways for this to happen. The Dynamo Youth Theatre offers young people the chance to grow through drama. The new All Aboard Club offers space for children to grow up before and after school – every day. NCH Action for Children leads a support group every Friday in our church hall. The MumBaba Group on Thursday morning helps young children learn music, dance and social skills. The Rainbows Group on Tuesday evenings teaches young girls valuable life skills. Our teachers at Sunday School, week after week, provide support to families, teaching our young people the things of God. All these opportunities help children to grow and develop, and therefore support their mothers as well. All these things we can do because we're a church! I am incredibly sorry for mothers who are trying to do the hard work of raising children on their own. So many mothers in our district think the only additional support they have as mothers is to plunge their baby in front of a Playstation of C-Beebies!. But as a church, as a body of people, we are stronger together - we can support each other as well as the local community. I wonder if you've thought about that? Have you ever thought that one of the main reasons to come to church is simply - to serve your neighbor? The main task of the church - the main purpose given by Christ is to carry the gospel, the good news about God, into the world. (Matthew 28). Part of this good news is that people are stronger, happier, better when they live in the community with each other - as members of the body of Christ. That's something worth remembering the next time you don't feel like coming to church... Next time you want to pull the duvet over your head and go to bed again. We do not come to church for our benefit - we come to the church for the good of the community. But when we stay home, at home, We can't be bothered to come... we leave a void. When we're not here, our place is empty - and so are the hearts of those we would have met... including this elderly person who has spent the week on his own, and is desperate for human companionship, including that young couple who start out in life, and need the guidance, love and support of people who have been married for years, including that mother who has been coping with a crying child all week - and needs to see the friendly smile , and earn your assurance that crying is normal, there's nothing wrong with her baby. - including that young woman who has not yet been blessed with a child - but who is supported by her pain and anxiety by the love of those around her. When we come to church, we show through our presence that we believe in the community. By committing to being here we act as mothers to those around us... and create a community that stretches and touches others. People who enter a church full of many people will be attracted to that community. In other words - don't come to church just for your benefit. Don't even come and worship God. Come to church because being here is part of your duty, part of your calling, your vocation, to be a Christian who lives in the community with other Christians. Come to church because it is like the church that we have the ability to become all God has made us to be – like people who need people. I need you. I hope you need me! We definitely need each other, and mothers need us. Just as Mary needed the people around her at the birth of her son, and again at his death, today's mothers needed us. So, on this maternal Sunday, we thank God for all mothers - and for the joy, privilege and incredible challenge of motherhood. We remember that motherhood is a calling that brings great joy, but can also bring great pain ... and we pray for all mothers and those who feel called to be mothers. But at the same time, we recognize that, this is how Maria taught us, the best motherhood takes place in the community with others, and, whatever, we dedicate ourselves to the fact that we are part of that community. Just like Mary. Amin Amin

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