

## All Age Mothering Sunday – Exodus 2: 1 - 10

Although we can't gather today as we would normally, we are exploring a different way of worship, of being church. As we can't be with each other physically, let's enjoy being together in a virtual sense, still joined by the Holy Spirit. Usually on Mothering Sunday, we would celebrate our Mums and those who care for us, even if families can't be together let's still celebrate those who care for us with some examples from the Bible and from books, and from our own lives.

Does anybody know who this is?

*(Hold up Paddington Bear soft toy)*

Yes, right – it's Paddington Bear. Whether you know him from books or from the television adaptation of the 1960s and 70s, or from the recent film remake (which incidentally is very good) the lovable bear with the duffle coat will be familiar to lots of us.

If you're not familiar with the stories, here's a brief synopsis. Paddington Bear comes from darkest Peru (*South America*). Now, I think the film takes some artistic licence, and in it we see the jungle where Paddington lives with his Aunt Lucy and Uncle Pastuzo. A devastating earthquake flattens their home, destroying their marmalade making machine and their family. Paddington and Aunt Lucy, who takes care of him, are left alone in the devastation, and set out to find somewhere new to live.

Aunt Lucy then does something incredibly brave.

*Does anyone know what Aunt Lucy does? Invite responses...*

Yes. She puts Paddington, in his little coat and wearing Uncle Pastuzo's hat (with his usual marmalade sandwich underneath!) into a lifeboat on a ship, and she sends him to London for safety. There, of course, he is famously found at Paddington station by the Brown family and quickly becomes one of their family.

What the books tell us about, but the film largely misses out, is the bond that remains between Paddington and Aunt Lucy. She was the one that Paddington knew as a parent and carer. Paddington has an adventure and at the end of it writes a postcard to Aunt Lucy or sticks something into his scrapbook to remind him of the places and people that are part of his life. He remembers his Aunt Lucy, that even though she is far away (I think she's in the Home for Retired Bears in Peru, I love that image!) she is still part of his family, and the feeling I have from reading the stories is that that is very important to his sense of identity. He loves his new family – Mr and Mrs Brown and their children – but his roots remain part of who he is.

So, here's an important question. When Aunt Lucy puts Paddington onto the boat and sends him away to London, do you think she loves him?

*Invite responses....and ask why they think that?*

I think you're right – or I think it's fair to say that she did love him, (*depending on the answers given!*) What Aunt Lucy did in sending Paddington away to London, was to give

him another chance at life, at happiness. For her, I can't imagine how difficult that decision was, but she acted in a way that would give him the best possible chance of a future, despite the pain that it caused to her as his mother figure. There are other times when parents make difficult decisions about their children, one of our readings today was about Moses. His mother, Jochebed, had hidden him from pharaoh's soldiers, but she knew she couldn't do that forever, if her son was to live, she needed to take drastic action. This action was quite bold, but she succeeded in saving her son's life, he was adopted by pharaoh's daughter. Now that's a big word, really it means that you agree to bring up a baby and make them a member of your family. It's something that still happens today. We know that Michael Bond's inspiration for Paddington and his famous 'Please look after this bear' luggage label came from seeing evacuees being sent away from London during the Second World War, parents acting selflessly to keep their children as safe as possible.

Now, I know Paddington isn't a real bear – yes, I do! But there are some things about his story that are very similar to the story about Moses that we heard read to us earlier. Can anyone spot anything that's similar between the Paddington and Moses stories?

*Invite responses – hoping for a boat, a baby (or a child) being sent away for safety, for a new chance at life, a mother acting out of love, a new chance for the baby or child....*

- There's a boat in each story and a baby or child is sent away by a mother, in order to keep them safe.
- There's a new chance at life, safety.
- A mother acts out of love.
- There's a new family caring for a child – who remembers their roots.

Moses's mother made the choice she did for him, to save him – from almost certain death. I'm a mum, and I can't imagine the pain she must have felt in leaving him in the basket in the river, waiting, daring to hope that he would be discovered by a person who would love him.

And of course, the story has a brilliant twist. I love the image of God's care for Moses and making sure that he is looked after by the right person at the right time.

What I think the stories of both Paddington and Moses tell us is that families aren't always straightforward. I'm old enough to remember the BBC TV series *2.4 children* – when 2.4 was statistically the average number of children in a UK family, impossible though that was. Families now are more likely to be a bit more complicated than that, with parents, stepparents, grandparents, aunts, cousins and other people who are important to us all helping to shape family life. I know growing up as a child, I had 'aunts and uncles' who weren't part of my biological family, and our children have the same now. For me as a mum, that's a really important part of raising children – the philosophy of it taking a village to raise a child – and I value immensely the insight and guidance that those a little further removed from our family life are able to provide.

I think that's why, in part, the short passage from John's gospel that we heard is so reassuring. In Jesus's final moments, he shows immense concern for his mother and his disciple, ensuring that they are both cared for in the times that are to follow. In doing so, he creates a new family to love each other, poured out of his love. How brilliant that we can see that and recognise the love of those around us who love us, not just our mothers but other people who have been put into our lives.

So, I wonder - who do you have that has cared for you and loved you in your life? I hope we'd all feel we could say we're loved by God, we are adopted by him, but I wonder who God has placed in your life to help show you that love?

Perhaps now, in these difficult and constantly changing times, we could all think about those who care for us, remember the luggage tag that Paddington has, saying please take care of this bear. Who cares for you? Remember the love and bravery of Jochebed and Aunt Lucy and how God cared for Moses, and how Jesus cared for his mother.

We are in a difficult situation now, with the Coronavirus and the effects it is having on our communities, whether that is local, national or global. We need to promote that sense of God's care as a parent, to each other, to mirror the care that God gives us to those in our communities. Let's be brave and bold, as Moses' mother was, trying to see a life for her son by allowing him to be adopted by Pharaoh's daughter.

I am going to finish with a more recent story of a brave and loving mother. Her name is Josephine. When she was 24, she found out that she was going to have a baby. Now this was a few years ago, and people then didn't think it was a good idea for a mother to raise a child on her own, and Josephine had no one to help her. She decided that the best thing was to give her baby to a family who would adopt and love her baby. I admire her love and bravery here. It was a selfless thing to do. This baby knew love and warmth and security all their lives. Can you guess who that baby is? Yes, it's me!

On this Mothering Sunday, let's remember and celebrate all those who care for us whatever title we give them, and that God cares for them and all of us.

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**Reverend Suzanne McAllister**

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