

Sermon for Mothering Sunday 2025 Colossians 3. 12-17 Luke 2. 33-35

At 5 to 10 on Wednesday evening I was sat with my husband on our sofa in front of our TV. Neither of us were capable of saying anything. We sat staring at the screen as the credits rolled. Craig stood up and in silence went to bed. I turned out the lights and followed him after drying my face.

We'd just finished the last episode of Adolescence.

I can't imagine there are many people in the UK who have now not heard of this seminal Netflix drama. For those of you who haven't seen it, Adolescence follows the journey of 13-year-old Jamie and his family after he's caught on CCTV stabbing a teenaged girl to death in a car park. Each episode is filmed in one long take, drawing the viewer in, so that you feel that you are a fly on the wall. The performances are extraordinary and leave you in no doubt that this is a piece of storytelling at its very best.

Adolescence is a story that holds a mirror up to our society. According to the House of Commons library, knife crime has almost doubled in England and Wales over the last thirteen years, and 17.3 % of perpetrators are between the ages of 10 and 17. The reasons for these scary stats are complex and there are plenty of organisations and people out there with an opinion, but one thing seems clear. The world our young people have to navigate in the 21st century is fraught with challenges and stumbling blocks.

Back in the day when I trained as a youth worker, we were taught that once a child reaches adolescence, parents have very little sway. A teenager's peer group becomes the greatest influence in their lives. It's why, we were

taught, youth work is so vital. Working with groups of young people outside of their homes and families can have a truly positive impact on their lives. Sadly, statutory youth service provision is now virtually non-existent. Historically these extra familial influencers were probably adults in the workplace (my granny went to work when she was 13) or community leaders running Scouts, Guides, marching bands etc. When the Scouting and Guiding movement began in the early 20th century, the overwhelming majority of the children were from working-class backgrounds. That is not the case today, despite huge efforts by the movement to widen participation.

All of this is to simply say that today our young people, particularly those from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, have far less access to adults outside of their families than ever before and in the search for identity and meaning they search online.

So, what's all this got to do with our readings today and the fact that today is Mothering Sunday.

Forgive me if you've heard me say this before, because at some point I say this every year but it's so important it's worth saying again and again. What we call this fourth Sunday in Lent really matters. Mother's Day is not part of the church's year. Mother's Day is an American tradition begun in 1908 by the social activist Anna Jarvis to honour mothers who had died. It caught on and soon greeting card companies had jumped on the bandwagon. Jarvis was horrified and tried to rescind the holiday. But the point is here that this commemoration was about women who have children. The fourth Sunday of Lent, or Mothering Sunday, is not. It's about the community. The tradition of returning to your mother church began in Medieval times. It was a

celebration of community and belonging to the family of God, represented by a simnel cake with 11 balls of marzipan to represent the apostles, minus Judas.

The word mother is a noun and consequently applies to a person. The word mothering is a verb and so the act of mothering can be performed by anyone. I asked an AI platform for a definition of mothering, and it came up with the following

Mothering refers to the act of caring for, nurturing, and protecting someone in a way traditionally associated with a mother. It can apply to biological mothers, adoptive mothers, or anyone who provides maternal care and guidance. Key Aspects of Mothering. Nurturing – Providing emotional and physical care Protecting – Ensuring safety and well-being. Guiding – Teaching life skills, morals, and values. Unconditional Love – Offering support without expecting anything in return.

Bearing all this in mind let's take a look at the passage from Colossians again.

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion and kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another, forgive each other. Above all clothe yourselves in love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Teach and admonish one another in all wisdom.

These instructions to the church at Colossi sound remarkably like the act of mothering to me. And notice, that these instructions apply to everyone. Paul is calling the community to look out for one another and to do so with love.

One of the issues raised in Adolescence is that young Jamie becomes quite isolated because his dad doesn't know how to deal with a boy that's not into sport. His parents buy him a computer and his dad reflects that Jamie spent hours in his room, but that he was happy about that thinking that he'd be safe. As becomes clear in the discussion with his psychologist, Jamie had become cut off from an extra parental support team who could have helped and supported him as he navigated our complex world.

So what about our gospel reading? I think there are two things to draw out. The first is that Jesus was just 8 days old when he was taken to the Temple to be named and circumcised. As a tiny baby he was brought into the Covenant. He was given an identity and a sense of place. The presence of Anna the prophet, who I think it's safe to assume had no children, and Simeon point to the wider sense of community that sadly is missing for so many in our own context.

The second thing to note, is Simeon's statement to Mary "and a sword will pierce your own soul". Mary's agony of watching her own perfect innocent son, tortured and nailed to a cross is unimaginable. Throughout the centuries Mary has often been understood as a mother to us all, because she bore so much pain. As the Theotokos, or God bearer, she is integral to the incarnation and so like her son she suffered the consequences of all our sin.

As the story of Adolescence unfolds, we watch the agony of Jamie's parents as their own souls are pierced. To say that these scenes are distressing is a bit of an understatement, but they are a wake-up call.

Our society is becoming ever more fractured. Mental health problems are rocketing amongst the young and the on-line space is offering a distorted

image of what relationships should look like. Older people are increasingly isolated, and many young parents are struggling to cope with the demands of small children and working to meet high housing costs. As a church we have been, quite rightly, in reflective mode over recent times, as we consider the things that we have got so badly wrong. But we also need to lean into the things that we get right. We are one of the few places now where different age groups, and people of different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds come together. Look around you this morning and we can see that we are a right mixed bunch. What a thing to celebrate.

For me, this is why the mission of the church is today as important as it's ever been. We can offer a vision of community where reconciliation with God, ourselves, each other and our world is at the heart of all we do. As I said at the beginning, Adolescence holds a mirror up to our society and so our challenge is how do we as God's children, holy and beloved, clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience and most of all love? How do we live out mothering, where we nurture, protect, guide and love each other? The answer is in our reading from Colossians. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Amen