

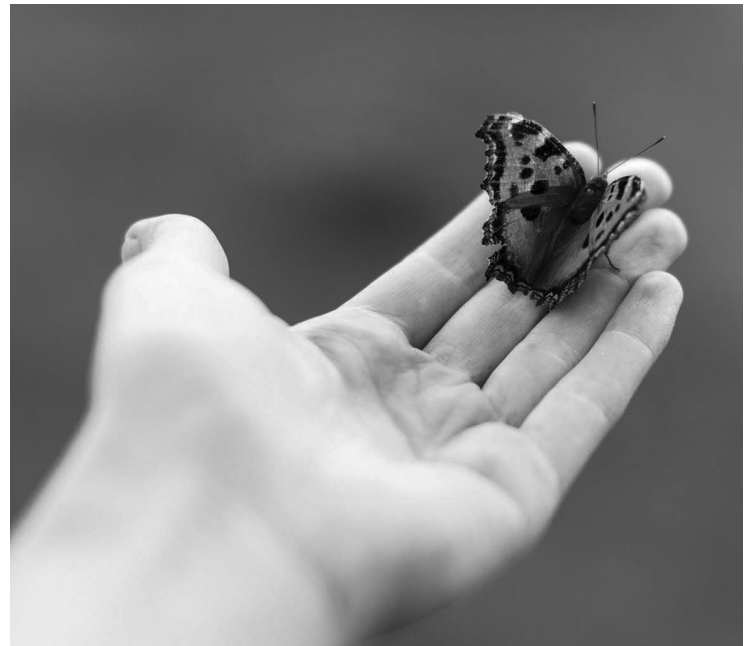
Letting go

Ricarda Witcombe *reflects on* Mark 8:31-38

We are in the second week of Lent, the season that invites us to give renewed attention to our lives and to allow the mercy of God to flow into the deepest places of our selves. Today's verses from Mark's Gospel may help to unlock some of the barriers that can prevent us from letting mercy touch us and from trusting God completely. These verses mark a turning point, where Jesus begins to teach his disciples something new: he turns their faces to the path ahead, which will be about pain and rejection and death. He adds some words about resurrection too but they are not able to understand that yet. The disciples resist his ideas and so

Jesus tries another way: he says true life is simply about following him. There is nothing we have to hold onto, nothing to bring with us – we are simply called to follow.

What might that mean for us? Could we trust God enough to let go of ourselves and follow? This is not about denying ourselves certain pleasures. It's about "letting go and letting God" as the phrase goes. Letting go of the world's judgements about self-worth or achievement. Letting go of our fears that we are not good enough or loving enough or holy enough. It's about letting go of all we defend so that we can fall into step with God and truly live the life God gives us. 🍷



Lord Jesus Christ, may we begin to let go of our selves and hold on to you; to let go of our fears and trust in your love; to let go of our defences and receive your mercy. May we follow you and know your life in us. Amen.

Motherhood in the Bible

Part I – seven barren matriarchs

by Becky Mynett

In the weeks leading up to Mothering Sunday, Becky Mynett looks at motherhood in the Bible.

Jewish Rabbinic tradition identifies seven barren women as the matriarchs of Israel. Firstly, Sarah was ninety when her husband Abraham was told she would bear a son. That child was Isaac, whose wife Rebekah was also barren, becoming pregnant with twins only after Isaac prayed for her.

Her son Jacob married two sisters, having been tricked into marrying Leah before marrying Rachel. Leah was childless until Jacob married Rachel, but then went on to have four sons. Finally, God remembered Rachel and she gave birth to Joseph and Benjamin.

In Judges we read about a man called Manoah, whose wife was barren until she was visited by an angel and conceived Samson, the Israelite hero who was a scourge of the Philistines. The sixth matriarch was Hannah, who prayed for a child and bore the great prophet Samuel.

In Jewish tradition, the seventh barren wife is a personification of Israel, based on Isaiah 54:1, but Christians might think of Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. 🍷

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Walking with Poppy *In the moment*

by Gillian Cooper

Jesus' disciples did not want to think about his death. They had that in common with most of us. It is hard to think about our own death, and that of people we love.

In dark days I envy Poppy, as she greets each new day with a

wagging tail. Poppy lives in the moment, free from dread. She knows she is loved and has a safe home, and she trusts that food will arrive when she needs it. She knows nothing of the future. She does not anticipate death. Although she has anxieties (buzzing flies, for example) they are quickly dealt with.

Knowing about death is humanity's curse: brought on ourselves, according to Genesis 3, when we chose consciousness over innocence in Eden. Without it we cannot be God's true partners in the world, but it comes at a cost. The knowledge of our death is ours to face, trusting in God's infinite love. 🍷

“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pain.”

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), poet and Jesuit priest