

On this Mothering Sunday – I think of how ...

Many mothers – work tirelessly – to give their children the best possible start in life.

Good mothers – and Fathers, too ...

Ensure their new-born children are properly looked after –

Try to give their infants healthy things to eat and drink –

Take their children to football – or pay for piano lessons –

And generally, do whatever it takes to ensure that their offspring grow up into happy and successful individuals.

We see a wonderful picture of a caring mother in our Old Testament reading from the Book of Exodus.

It's about 3,000 years ago – and

a Levite woman – one of the Hebrews – God's chosen people –

has given birth to a son in the land of Egypt.

At this time – God's people are slaves to the Egyptians.

And even worse – baby *boys* are at risk of being slaughtered by their oppressive overlords.

So, his mother – who's name we learn later is Jochebed – takes baby Moses and hides him in a basket in the reeds – in the hopes that he will be saved.

It's a selfless act – seeking the best – not for *herself* – but for her child.

Well – you may know the story ...

As we heard – baby Moses is rescued by an Egyptian princess.

And even better – by a minor miracle – Moses ends being nursed by his own mother.

This daring act – shows how far a good mother will go in seeking the wellbeing of her child.

But how far should a mother – or a father – go?

Are there limits – on what a good parent – should do to ensure that their child has the best possible life?

Is there a line – that shouldn't be crossed?

Last month, a 19-month-old baby girl called Teddi made the news headlines.

She was the first child in the UK to receive a life-saving gene therapy treatment for the fatal disorder –

metachromatic leukodystrophy –

also known as MLD.

This revolutionary therapy –

effectively removed Teddi's defective genes –

and replaced them by healthy copies of the same genes.

In essence – the DNA –

the biological code that made Teddi, Teddi – was rewritten ...

So that she can now do the things that children are supposed to do –  
like going to school and playing with friends ...

Things that had been impossible before the treatment.

It's a remarkable story.

And this kind of gene therapy opens up a world of amazing possibilities.

So, which good mother – or father –

if their child was diagnosed with a medical condition like this–

*wouldn't* want such amazing, life-transforming treatment?

A normal and active life without pain seems like a wonderful gift to give your child.

But suppose that the medics and scientists said to the parents:

“Look, since we’re changing one gene ... why don’t we change a few more? – With the right genetic tweaks, we could make your child totally immune to cancer. – Just think, cancer free – for life – *guaranteed!*”

Should the good mother and the good father choose such a life for their child?

And now the doctors say to the parents:

“Actually, being cancer free is just the tip of the iceberg. ... Through gene editing, we can give you a child that’s healthy – intelligent – musical – sporty – with the exact hair and eye colour of your choice. ... How about it?”

What should the good mother and the good father do now?

These kinds of questions have exercised the experts in

medical ethics –

moral philosophy – and

Christian theology.

So, what’s the answer?

Or at least ...

What *light* – might Christian faith – shed on these questions?

Well ... first ...

We remember that God has given us human beings an incredible degree of intelligence.

We can design space probes that travel way beyond our solar system.

We can build incredible architectural structures –

magnificent cathedrals – and

gravity-defying bridges.

We can write music and poetry – of such emotion and beauty –

that it makes us weep with sorrow – or fills our hearts with joy.

God has created – us human beings –

as co-creators –

people who can share in God’s creative delight.

So, there’s nothing wrong – in principle – with creating ambitious medical treatments.

Scientists – are sometimes accused – of “*playing God*” ...

But “playing” is far too *casual* a word.

This co-creating task – of joining in *God’s* creative work isn’t *playing*.

It’s a work of great seriousness and significance –

which needs to be approached with utmost caution.

So – yes – scientists may be creative in their discoveries –

*we* may be creative in *our* lives –

but each one of us needs to create with caution and responsibility.

This means thinking about *what* we make – and *what* we do.

Here – we can do far worse than to think about the life and ministry of Jesus.

Here was a man who – as *God’s* Son – was supremely creative ... producing –

wine from water –

sight from darkness –

life from the cold death of the tomb.

But it’s notable what Jesus *doesn’t* create.

When Jesus heals blind Bartimaeus –

he gives him normal, everyday sight –

not super x-ray telephoto ultra-vision.

Those who are lame are granted the ability to walk –

not to run faster than a speeding bullet –

or to leap tall buildings in a single bound.

Each person who comes to Jesus for healing leaves with just that – healing ...

not some kind of radically enhanced superhuman ability.

And that – I think – gives us a clue to what *we* should be doing with our genetic – and other medical – technologies.

We should be seeking to being about healing and wholeness –

to create normal, ordinary human beings –

not to fashion some kind of enhanced superbeing.

There’s *another* reason why we might come to that conclusion.

It’s found in the opening of the Book of Genesis.

There we see *God* creating the world – the universe –

light and darkness –

animals and birds –

plant life and human beings.

*God* sees all that he has made, and it is “very good”.

Everything is “just right” – exactly as it should be.

And then we come to a verse that ought –

to surprise us –

to make us sit up and take notice –  
and to shout: “*what?!*”

It’s Genesis chapter 1, verse 28.

There, God says to the man and woman – Adam and Eve:

“*Be fruitful and multiply; and fill the earth and subdue it.*”

D’you see the problem?

This *apparently* perfect world of God’s creation – this Garden of Eden – isn’t yet finished.

The man and woman –  
haven’t yet been fruitful.

The earth –  
isn’t yet filled.

Creation –  
is not yet subdued.

(Whatever “*subdued*” might mean, but that’s for another sermon.)

The point is that – *even* in God’s newly-minted world – there’s still room for  
growth and – change and  
development and – coming into being.

If everything is made –  
fully formed – and  
entirely complete – and  
genetically corrected – and  
effortlessly perfected ...  
then actually it’s *not* perfect at all.

Things need to grow and change.

For it’s through the slow – unhurried – struggle of growth and change that God’s work is  
accomplished.

As any good parent knows – father or mother –  
it’s not – having a new fully-formed adult descendent – that gives you the greatest joy  
–  
wonderful though it is when your children leave home!

No.

It’s watching your child grow – bit by bit – over the years.

It’s helping them take their first unsteady steps.

It’s hearing them read – tentatively at first and then more confidently.

It’s seeing them develop personalities – interests – and passions – all of their own.

And sometimes ...

It’s sitting with them when they’re ill.

Or comforting them when they’re anxious.

Or forgiving them when they've done something wrong – or stupid – or *both*!

For being a good mother or father means being with your child – in their struggles and in their suffering.

*Not* wishing suffering upon them, of course.

But knowing that suffering can't always be taken away, either.

Being a good parent means – just being there.

It's what Jochebed did for Moses.

It's what Mary experienced.

In our New Testament reading, Simeon described this kind of suffering as – a sword piercing Mary's soul ...

words that point – to this godly mother – watching her son die in agony on the cross.

Being a good mother or father – means being with your child –

in their growth –

in their struggles – and

in their suffering.

And if genetic manipulation –

eradicates all suffering –

takes away those opportunities –

then it's robbing both child and parent – of the things that build up precious bonds of love and care.

One final point.

As Christians –

who believe in God's parental care –

who pray: "Our Father..."

All this reminds us of what God is like.

For God is the kindest – wisest – best parent of all.

For God is there as we take our first unsteady steps of faith ...

As we start to wonder: "Is this *true*?"

God is with us as we gradually grow into Christian maturity ...

As we begin to pray and live a life of discipleship.

And God stays close by our side in those times of difficulty –

the sin –

the guilt –

the shame –

the pain –

the foolishness –

the disappointment –

life's hardest trials.

God – as our loving Father – and benevolent Creator –  
doesn't form us perfect at the start –  
flawless –  
totally finished individuals –  
with perfect lives – and polished faith.

Rather, God has created each one of us – like the Garden of Eden –  
with the potential  
for growth – and development –  
change – and transformation.  
Even through suffering.

For God knows –  
that it's through these times of struggle that we grow –  
bit by bit –  
into the people –  
that we are truly meant to be.