**Mothering Sunday - 19<sup>th</sup> March 2023.  Exodus 2:1-10.**

I wonder what is the hardest thing that you think a mother does.  Early on in a child's life it might be changing nappies.  As my children grew up, becoming a taxi driver late at night was something that I found tough – I'd much rather be in my bed!  The latest aspect of my own experience that I've found it hard to do is letting them go, but I recognise that this is what I have to do if I love them.

I want to look at two stories that illustrate that this letting go is part of loving someone you care about.

The first story is about the character illustrated here – Paddington Bear.  Paddington Bear was born in darkest Peru and lived with his Aunt Lucy and Uncle Pastuzo, after he was orphaned in an earthquake.  When Aunt Lucy moves into the Home for Retired Bears in Lima, Peru, she has to let him go, and she does something incredibly brave by putting him into a lifeboat on a ship going to London because he will be safer there.  It must have been difficult to say goodbye to Paddington, but wanting to give him the chance of a better life makes it a loving thing to do.

To show just how much she loves Paddington, Aunt Lucy puts a luggage label around his neck with the words `Please look after this Bear, Thank you`.

The Brown family find him soon after he arrives at Paddington Station, and, as a result of reading that label, they take him into their home.  However, the bond between Aunty Lucy and Paddington remains and he writes a postcard to her regularly about his adventures.  He doesn't forget his past or those who cared for him.

The Paddington bear story is similar to my second story this morning, which we heard in our reading from Exodus.  Jochebed, Moses' mother also had a difficult decision to make about her baby son Moses.  The story is set in Egypt at a dangerous time when Pharoah had given the order that all Hebrew new-born boys were to be killed.

Jochebed hid Moses until he was three months old but then she could no longer keep him safe.  Just like Aunt Lucy, Jochebed did a very brave thing and put Moses in a waterproof basket and hid him in the reeds on the bank of a river.  No doubt at that time she was feeling heartbroken, anxious, worried.  However, she prayed and trusted that God would find someone else to take care of Moses and he would have a better life.  She let him go.  Moses' older sister, Miriam, watched over him while Pharaoh's daughter noticed the basket when she came down to the river and rescued him.  Pharaoh's daughter agreed that a Hebrew woman should look after Moses, and, not knowing who she was, was introduced to Jochebed.

Later Pharaoh`s daughter looked after Moses until he was an adult. Moses became a great leader of Israel, which was part of God's plan, but if Jochebed had not handed him over to God and to Pharaoh's daughter, this would never have come about.

And, of course, God himself had to let his own son, Jesus, go when he was born here on earth.  He had to allow Mary and Joseph to bring him up as a child in their home in Nazareth and then allow him to make his own way in the world when he started his ministry, culminating in his crucifixion on the cross.  Our gospel reading includes that well-loved verse from scripture, John 3:16:

> *For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son. God gave his Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost but have eternal life.*

It's because God loved the world that he let Jesus go.  Similarly, all mothers and fathers, as well as other people who care for children, must at some point let those children move on, so they can develop and grow and become adults living independent lives.

Letting go is one of the hardest things I've had to do as a mother, but it's part of loving someone you care about.  Both Jochebed and Aunt Lucy were brave and acted through love when they `let go`.

Trusting that God will watch over those we let go is an important part of this bravery.  The fact that he did it for his own son gives us greater trust that he will continue to watch over our own children when we let them go.