Today feels like a rather unprecedented day possibly in church history, but certainly in my life time. No public worship to take place anywhere in the Church in Wales or England. This seems particularly ironic given that traditionally Mothering Sunday was the one day of the year that children in service in the big estate houses were allowed to return home to worship in their mother churches that they had grown up in. Along the way they would pick posies of wild flowers for their mothers ready for the family gathering at lunchtime. Something else that so many families will be missing out on today as well. Family time. Time can’t be spent with elderly parents, or self isolating family members. Difficult times. Everyone has a story to tell. Stories of hardship, pain, sadness. Tales of loneliness or of fear. Images of panic buying and bare shelves.

Both our bible stories this morning were written in times of great hardship and trial. The baby Moses has been born as the Pharaoh in Egypt decrees that all Israelite baby boys must be killed as they are born. Imagine if you are his mother. Imagine your fear and panic, the hushed tones of the midwives as they sadly whisper “it’s a boy”. But Moses mother trusts in God, she clings to the ancient religion of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and she hides her baby. Her faithfulness is rewarded and the baby is saved by the Pharaoh’s daughter, and by the quick-witted thinking of her daughter Moses mother is allowed to bring up her child as his nurse.

But what about Jesus? Mary and Joseph have their baby when Israel is occupied by Roman rule. King Herod has ordered the slaughter of all the baby boys when he hears that a new king has been born, a king who might threaten his status. A decree that so threatens Jesus life that his parents flee as refugees to Egypt. But before that happens, despite the Roman influence with its own gods, Mary and Joseph cling to the religion of their nation, and they trust in their God. They take the baby to the temple to make the necessary sacrifices upon the birth of a child. When an old man called Simeon, led by the Holy Spirit, comes to prophesy over the baby that he recognises the child as the promised Messiah. God’s promised saviour of his people. But his prophecy soon holds the words of foreboding that we read this morning. The happy ending given to Moses mother, is not there for Mary. Her son is going to responsible for the rising and falling of many, and a sword will pierce her own soul too. And just over 30 years later, that prophecy comes true. Mary stands there, watching her first born son, as he hangs from a cross, suffering a horrendous criminal’s death. All that she cares about is wiped out in front of her very eyes. Her world falls apart around her.

Because, the message of the Bible isn’t “Trust in God and everything will be fine.” It isn’t “trust in God and he will do exactly what you want”. The message of the Bible is trust in God and he will be with you whatever your circumstances. He will love you through the thick and the thin. In fact he loves you so much that he was willing to sacrifice his only son that we might be able to have eternal life in his presence. And in return, he asks us for two things. To love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind, and To love your neighbour as you love yourself.

And maybe over the next few weeks or months, as church services remain banned, and we are isolated in our own homes, the way that we do these things will change. But also, we will have the time and space to take stock of our lives and determine how do we love God with all of our heart, all of our soul and all of our mind? How do we worship him at home in our daily lives? How do we share fellowship with one another? How do we protect the vulnerable? Love the poor? Help the homeless? How do we nurture our church family who are self isolated, or the children who can’t go to school?

I have been greatly heartened over the last week, as life is starting to drastically change, that not all the stories have been bad news stories. But there have also been tales of kindness and warmth and love. As I popped over the road to check on my elderly neighbour, I noticed there was already a church member there talking to her at a safe distance across her driveway, having just dropped off a loaf of bread. Baptism families, as we have phoned up to postpone their children’s baptisms, instead of getting cross, they have asked how they might help the community. Our church facebook posts of psalms and prayers have reached hundreds of people. When people have been phoned to check they are ok, they tell of people in the church phoning them for a chat. Our public acts of worship may have stopped but the love of God is already spilling over into love of neighbour. Whatever your circumstances at this time can I encourage you on this Mothering Sunday, to consider the whole community as your family. If you are able to get out and help others with provisions, then thank you. But if you are locked down, thank you for continuing to pray, and remember that your friends, neighbours and clergy are still there on the other end of the phone.