

Being a mother to young children is scary. Being a mother to adolescents is terrifying.

Six Weeks and four days ago my 18 year old daughter stepped onto a plane and left Australia for three months to live in a remote village in Zambia, Africa.

About a year ago my other daughter travelled through India, catching local buses and staying in small ashrams along her way.

Later this year, my 21 year old son will be packing his favourite skateboards to go travelling on his own through Europe.

If I allowed myself to dwell too long on the dangerous possibilities of these situations, I think I would be crippled with fear. I have stood helpless at the hospital bedside of adolescents. I know first hand the risks and repercussions of poor choices adolescents and teenagers make today. The relationship I have with my brave, confident, and adventurous children would be severely compromised if I allowed my fears to dictate what they can or can't do. My kids are not mine to keep safe and close at all times. They are not mine at all. Their life is theirs. The choices they make are theirs.

My own mother never stood in the way of me exploring the world. I disappeared at 22 years of age to live in London. I remained there for four years before I returned to Sydney. Communication at that time was via letters, telegrams and the occasional short phone call. I often did not speak to her for weeks. How my mother did not go mad with worry I do not know. My mother never measured. I have never felt that I have let her down or disappointed her. I have only felt loved and respected for the choices I have made. My mother taught me more than anyone else about what God's love is. I know that the love of God is unconditional and unwavering because that is what she showed me.

When I was asked to reflect on the readings and words of our mass today, I kept coming back to the words in our opening prayer. The opening prayer in today's mass talks about God calling Mary to a life of possibility - possibility of fear, possibility of danger, the possibility of disaster and possibility of desolation. The possibility of love, delight and glory. She really did embrace every one of these possibilities in her time with her son Jesus. I especially love the line "You love her completely and she responded in love". This opening prayer and this line about love resonates with my beliefs about parenting and mothering. If I love my own kids completely, without judgement, without measurement, without smothering their spirit they will respond in love. By opening myself up to the possibility of danger and desolation I am also opening myself up to the possibility of love and glory. It takes great courage to be a mother. It takes both mental and moral strength to accept the choices my children make. My mother taught me that I am acceptable. I pray that my kids and yours will know they too are more than acceptable too.

***By Mrs Mary Cartmer***