

Bishop Keith, Sunday 22 March 2020

John 19:25-27

Diocese of Chester, Jesus' words and our Prayer.

"Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home."

We are living in strange times.

This week I have been wondering whether to bring my 94-year-old mother up from her flat in Sutton on the edge of London to Birkenhead. At moment she is deciding to stay put where actually she will be safest. For me and my brothers, as with so many of us, trying to know how to love one another, wondering "what does love mean?"

Here in today's gospel the record of a moment between son and mother in a time far stranger than anything we now know; a mother seeing her son dying in the most painful and humiliating way it was possible for humans to devise, a time of cruelty and terrible grief.

In that time and at that moment Jesus is loving his mother; he commits her to the disciple who is with her and the other women, the one, who is the writer of these words who we know as John, the beloved, the one with whom Jesus connects deeply in his self-giving love (agape love). This is the same love, John has said, God has for the world (John 3:16).

John will receive Jesus mother, he will love her, take her into his home where she will be safe.

Two simple thoughts for this time.

This moment at the cross is one of the moments in which the Church is formed. In that relationship of self-giving love which includes and goes beyond the love of a human family, the whole Church finds her true identity. We are given to each other as brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers.

How good to know of how the Lord's church is loving like this now in this diocese and across the world. I heard today that in Congo our link dioceses, the churches there as with us are closed for public worship; we are facing the same grief and pain, but we are given the same love.

Second, this episode happens at the cross. John the beloved disciple tells us earlier in the gospel the meaning of Jesus' death "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

The invitation to love creating the Church comes from that same love which took Jesus to the cross; the place where all human evil and sin is taken and turned around.

With the good stories of love and grace at this time are other stories; a doctor in the same church home group as my mother, she works in the local hospital, told her group this week of those stealing the face masks and the sanitising hand gel from within the hospital which the doctors and nurses themselves require to stay safe.

Jesus died on the cross to bear our guilt, bestow forgiveness, and bring us to new birth in the true self-giving love of God.

May we hear Jesus' words from the cross speaking to us today. May we see in our neighbour, our mother and father, sister and brother, for whom Jesus died.

Today we may not take them into our home, but we may help them live in their own home more safely, knowing they are beloved.

If Jesus could do that for his mother and disciple at that time, then; he will do the same for us in this time, now.