

John 19: 25b - 27

I was due to preach at St Thomas' on this Mothering Sunday so I thought that I would pop down a few updated thoughts based on where we are now with the COVID-19 situation.

Mothering Sunday has been somewhat hijacked over the years hasn't it?

Most people call it Mothers day, and in recent years a whole industry has risen up to provide cards, flowers and chocolates to be given by those who are able to give them to their mothers.

For others, it's a very sad day, for a multitude of reasons, I know of several women who just stay away from Church altogether on this particular Sunday, because they find it too painful. Our prayers are with them at this time.

But Mothering Sunday wasn't anything to do with mothers originally. It was a Sunday when the Virgin Mary, the Mother of our Lord was remembered and honoured.

Perhaps it started to be known as Mothers Day, because it was traditional, on this Sunday to go to your Mother Church, either the Cathedral or the church that you were baptised in. Of course this meant that people would return home and be able to meet with their family, including their mothers.

So there is a certain bitter irony, that the very first Sunday that we are unable to meet together is Mothering Sunday!!!

Today we were to have a reading from John 19: 25b – 27

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

We find ourselves at the foot of Jesus' cross.

We see there a group of women, Mary, Jesus mother and her sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. Alongside them was John.

All these disciples were present and could see what was happening, no doubt stricken with horror, grief and despair. They were probably too taken in the moment to worry about what might happen next, that would come later.

This is the point at which we are told that Jesus looks down from the cross, and seeing his mother standing next to John he says;

“Woman here is your son”

and to John;

“Here is your mother”

Jesus, despite all the pain and anguish he was suffering, was full of compassion for those whom he loved, and wanted to make sure that they looked after each other.

Jesus is full of love and compassion for you.

And he says the same thing to each one of us.

“Here is your mother, and here is your son” you are family now.

Jesus entrusts each one of us, into each others care, and asks us to look after each other and support each other through good times and bad.

We have had a relatively long period of good times, but now it seems that we are entering a significant time where life will be more difficult.

The COVID-19 virus is changing our lives in almost every respect at the moment, we are all being asked to make drastic changes to the way we live our lives.

Everyone is being asked to maintain social distancing, to go out only when it is strictly necessary.

People who are at increased risk from the virus such as the over 70's and those with underlying health conditions (this includes anyone who is invited for a flu jab each year), are being strongly advised to socially isolate and keep social interaction to an absolute minimum.

All this has resulted in the suspension of public worship in our churches.

Does that mean that church is cancelled?

Absolutely not, remember the church is the body of Christ, not the building.

If we are not able to meet in a particular building, then we must redouble our efforts in other ways to remain the active body of Christ.

We must take even more care to heed the words of Jesus to care for each other.

I think if Jesus were to speak to us today, the message would be the same as during his earthly life.

Love God with all your heart, and love your neighbour as yourself.

He would ask us to care for each other, look after each other, comfort each other just as he did to Mary and John from the cross.

There is a tendency for people to try and carry on as before, to grin and bear it, that stiff upper lip, the blitz spirit etc. to muck in and be busy at the centre of things.

This is not the time to carry on as before!

If we are to obey those commandments from Jesus, we must do so in a different way at the moment.

Panic buying at the supermarket isn't one of the ways forward. That doesn't show love for your neighbour.

Neither does it show love for your neighbour, if you ignore the instruction to minimise contact with others, risking spreading the disease further.

It doesn't show love for our neighbour to ignore the risk to ourselves. Especially if we are in one of the higher risk groups, because if we were to fall ill, then we might take up a high dependency bed that would then not be available to others. Our NHS and other medical staff are working hard enough, without us adding to their workload unnecessarily.

For the moment, loving our neighbour as ourselves means keeping a distance.

It means staying at home when we would prefer to be out.

It means heeding the advice from medical experts so that this disease can be brought to an end as quickly as possible.

So does that mean that we can't love our neighbour?

Of course not, but we must do it in new ways.

As a parish, we are putting plans and programs in place to ensure that we can keep in contact with all the congregation throughout the period that we are not able to meet with each other face to face.

I would encourage each one of you to join in.

Telephone each other, check up on one another, have a chat and let each other know that you are thinking about one another.

If you are not in one of the vulnerable groups and are able, you could offer to collect shopping for those not able to leave home, but do observe the strict

hygiene and distancing guidelines so that both you and the other person are protected.

If you are able, give more to the foodbanks whilst they can stay open, people will need help more than normal.

Pray for one another.

Pray for the school, the teachers, children and parents as they face a prolonged period of time when the gates will be shut to most children.

Pray for those left without work, or whose livelihoods have been impacted by the virus. Pray for businesses struggling to keep going and paying staff, and for the self employed.

Pray for those affected by the virus.

Pray for those fighting the virus.

Pray for those who are caring for the sick and vulnerable.

Pray for an end to the virus.

We are encouraging people to join in with prayer at home each day so that we can all be together in spirit.

You should receive a booklet in the coming week containing a pattern of daily prayer that we can all join in with that will help us pray together.

We are still the body of Christ, we are not divided just because we are not able to meet together for the time being.

We are not defeated.

We are never left alone!

Wherever we are!

Jesus said, "and remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt 28: 20)

May God be with you and bless you always.

Amen.

with thanks to

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