

## **Mothering Sunday**

**John 19.25-27 & Colossians 3.12-17**

**Sunday 14th March 2021**

**10.30am Cathedral Eucharist Bradford Cathedral**

Heavenly Father. Send your Holy Spirit to open our hearts and minds to your loving presence. In Jesus' name. Amen.

One of the things I am deeply grateful to my mum for is her sense of fair play. Growing up she went to great lengths to divide the sweets, the pocket money, the pudding, and the chores, evenly between my brother and I. Of course, it didn't stop us interrogating my mum to test the consistency in the application of this rule: one always had to check just in case.

And if there was the slightest hint of unfairness the cry would go up and the bickering would start... my poor mother!

It seems so silly when I look back: my brother and I love and respect my mum and trust her implicitly, yet our behaviour suggested other motivations at play, ones we were completely unaware of as children.

Families are complex, and messy, because relationships are complex and messy.

There is a fragility to the human condition that more often than not trips us up in our relationships. Misunderstandings easily sneak in, even in the healthiest of relationships.

Each one of us is highly complex: our motivations are continually being affected, and influenced, by those around us: our upbringing, the pressures of life, our life experiences, and, of course, our faith.

We use all of who we are, and have ever been, as a framework for how we engage with others and make assumptions about their own motivations.

Sometimes we get it right and often we get it wrong. No wonder when somebody stops and asks how you are today, we tend to keep the answer simple because the truth is anything but simple.

Yet for all its complexities and mishaps relationships, and more specifically the family, is the construct by which God, our Father, chooses to engage with us and invites us to be part of.

Because family, despite all its many challenges, is at its very best the place we call home: the set of relationships which love us regardless of our difference, our disagreements and our mistakes.

The place we should find joy and times of celebration, where we fondly treasure past memories and share hopes for the future.

Family is where we should be able to come home to and always find a welcome; be able to say stupid things and be forgiven; to kick our shoes off at the end of the day and be ourselves and still know that we are loved.

Now I know for many this is not the experience of family, but this is what family should be like and this is the family dynamic that God has in mind when he calls the church to be an extension of family: A safe place where we all matter and all know love and love in return.

Paul's letter to the Colossians gives a clear message of what the church, as family, should look like.

He reminds his brothers and sisters to clothe themselves with compassion, and kindness, humility, and meekness, patience and love, and why? Because they are holy and beloved.

This list of qualities is of fundamental importance if we, as the church, are ever to be family.

The problem with our flawed fragile natures is that this core list of essentials has somehow been downgraded, to a 'nice to have', and replaced with words like strong, robust, courageous, resilient, tough, leader, business-like, the list goes on.

These words, of course, do all have their place, but they should not be at the top of the list. They are all words that evoke images of strength and power. They are the language of striving, but they are not the language of the cross.

Words such as kindness and compassion rarely appear at the top of job descriptions: we rarely identify them as core to essential, successful leaders and yet they are at the very heart of the call to be followers of Christ.

Kindness and compassion; our attitudes of both heart and mind. To have kindness and compassion, we have to interrogate our own motivations; we have to ask ourselves the difficult and awkward question: "why do I not feel kind or compassionate towards this person?"

Serious soul searching and honesty are the standards by which we are judging others, misplaced: do they truly reflect God's love?

We have to look within before we can look beyond, and as we look within, we should do so in the knowledge that we are loved.

To be a family shaped by compassion, kindness, love, humility, patience and meekness requires time and, yes, courage. Courage to stop trying to control everyone around us, to include ourselves in that list. Courage to let go of the concept of success as defined by the world. Strength is not a mark of success. The ability to draw close to Christ; to reflect his love, and his compassion, are.

We have to find time to listen to what our family is saying to us.

The source of hurt for many is born of injustice, that feeling of being treated unequally. And many in the church family experience this because of their gender, their sexuality, the colour of their skin, the lack of education, or their social standing, because of their age, their disability, their socio-economic condition. The list goes on.

The difference is not an excuse for indifference.

The language of power and striving does not make room easily for those without power to be heard and often deepens division.

Most of us have experienced injustice in varying degrees, and carry the wounds.

The journey of life is bumpy: we get bruised and scarred, and Jesus, who we love and follow, experienced the same bumpy, bruising and scarring journey.

As he hung on the cross, his final act before the ultimate separation from humanity, that death would bring, was one of unifying love, as he tenderly gave his mother and friend to each other, to be family.

In that moment of deepest pain and suffering, he looked beyond himself and declared that family was important – and love for him would be their bond.

Family is about recognizing that we are all affected by the rough and tumble of this life, but we need to find a new language that heals and not divides.

The pandemic has affected us all in many different ways. As we emerge from a year of isolation and desolation, we need more kindness, compassion, love and humility than we have ever known before.

Everyone is fragile; everyone will emerge differently: some exhausted and weary from the long hours of relentless work and care of family, others weighed low with grief and loss; some wanting to rush forward, to embrace the world, and celebrate, others with deep levels of anxiety; some with rapturous joy, others angry and upset, feeling like the world has forgotten them. It's going to be messy and it's going to be complicated.

We need an ocean of love, patience, and time, if we are going to do this together as family.

This will require courage, not to rush ahead, or try and return everything to what it was before. We will need time to listen and the humility to hear what is being said. We will need to be kind, even when we don't understand what each other is going through.

Mothering Sunday is the day when children are encouraged to be extra nice and well behaved, as a mark of heartfelt appreciation for the love and care they have received: a day of sharing, patience, kindness and love.

Why don't we extend Mothers' Day to all members of our family of the church; not just today but always: to show our love, our appreciation of each other, to cherish and to listen

to each other and to embrace the reality that we are all chosen, we are holy and we are beloved. Amen.