

Sunday 22nd March Mothering Sunday

Well, this isn't how I thought I would be speaking to you today!

I was looking forward to worshipping with you as we celebrate Mothering Sunday. But as we can't do that, I'd like to begin with a prayer.

We pray for Mothers and carers today, those whose lives are celebrated and whose children love them. We pray for mothers and carers who are heartbroken, those who are grieving, those who for whatever reason are separated from their children, and those unable to have children.

We pray for those who never experienced love from their mother, those who have a difficult relationship with them and those whose mother no longer knows them due to illness, or dementia, and those whose mother is no longer alive.

Here in our church and community we are family, we worship as individuals, but also as a family. We all belong to our church and a loving and caring God. Amen

I hope that you are all keeping well and that those of you who are self-isolating have everything you need. We are trying hard to compile a list of EVERYONE who is self-isolating, or unwell, to ensure that each of you receives a telephone call, or an email from someone from St Peter's at least once a week. Please let Sarah know if you are self-isolating, or unwell on 01932 253452, or theoffice@stpetershersham.com and please call me at any time if you are worried, or just want a chat. My number is 01932 227445.

I am sure that many of you are feeling as sad as I am that we cannot meet and worship together today. But even though we won't physically be together, we are still part of the same family and we can still join in prayer. I have added a suggestion at the end of this email to light a candle at 7pm this evening and attached a short suggested prayer.

I had planned a 'Mothering Sunday type of sermon for today, but on Tuesday afternoon I received an email from Bishop Andrew telling me that all public worship had been suspended, so instead what I offer you today is a reflection on our situation now.

I thought we would look at the gospel reading that we heard a couple of weeks ago again.

Matthew 6: 25- 34

"Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore, do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed, your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

Today, we are on a threshold. We are in what Rob Bell; the American writer and pastor describes as 'The moment before the moment.' We are facing a pandemic, the like of which we have not seen in our lifetime and predictions about the spread of it are changing quickly. So, what does 'do not worry' look like in times such as these?

Well, it doesn't mean ignore the public health advice.

The reformer Martin Luther was a teacher of theology and a priest in Germany, at the time when bubonic plague was ravaging the country. He wrote "I shall ask God to mercifully protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to be contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others." This is still the most sensible approach today. Pray first and trust in God's care and protection, but at the same time take as many sensible steps to avoid encountering the virus as you can.

The Apostle Paul says in his letter to the Philippians "Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (*Philippians 4:6*)

In the face of the trials that are to come, even though we may not be able to worship together for a while we trust that the Lord is with us, we can turn to him with our prayers and our supplications. Whether we are in church, or self-isolating, or unwell at home. Wherever we are, we have solid comfort in the assurance of the words, "The Lord is near to us."

Although we may not physically see each other for a while, I will continue to pray for all of you and I know that during this time we are joined in prayer.

Over the coming weeks I'm going to try and experiment with recording sermons and hopefully live streaming a service over the Easter period. This will take me way out of my comfort zone, as many of you will know technology doesn't come naturally to me, in fact I'm what you would call a technophobe! However now is the time to learn, and to practice what I preach and 'not worry' about getting it wrong. I'm sure that by the time we meet again I will have developed many new technical skills!

I said at the beginning of this email that I was going to invite you all to light a candle and join with me, and many others around the country in prayer at 7pm this evening. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York have invited us to "light a candle in the windows of your homes as a visible symbol of the light of life, Jesus Christ, our source and hope in prayer." I suggest we say together the prayer of St Patrick's breastplate, or if you would like to the words of the Lord's Prayer.

"Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort and restore me. Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger, Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mouth of friend and stranger." Amen

from St Patrick's Breastplate

As we continue to be joined together in prayer you may like to join me in saying the morning and evening prayers together. I normally say the morning prayer at about 7.30am, and the evening prayer before I start preparing dinner, but feel free to say it whenever suits you. The Church of England has provided a printable copy of both on their website. Just click the link 'Worship at home'.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-liturgy-and-prayer-resources>

If you are unable to get it please let Sarah, or me know and we will print a copy off for you and send it.

God Bless.

Jackie