



Sunday, 22 March, 2020

Mothering Sunday

Last Tuesday, the archbishops of Canterbury and York advised that we suspend public worship, which means that this week (and until further notice) there will be no public services in any of our churches. They have not ceased to be places of prayer and worship. St John's remains open as usual during the day for private prayer. Aware of the importance of prayer at this time, Sarah and I are continuing to say Evening Prayer each day, and to celebrate Eucharists on Sundays and Principal Feasts as well as during the midweek slots. The ALMs are saying prayers in the three churches not being used for the Eucharist each Sunday.

However, we are mindful that this is a significant disruption which affects everyone's spiritual lives. This is not a decision which will have been taken lightly, but it impacts heavily on all of us. It may interrupt worshipping patterns which have lasted for decades. For some, it may remove valuable contact with other people and opportunities to socialise and see friends. We have no idea how long it will last.

We want to stay in contact with the congregation during this time and to provide whatever connection we can with Church. Therefore we will be producing this pew sheet each week and delivering it to all the regular members of the Group congregations. It will also be posted online on the websites and Facebook pages; if you have internet access and would rather not receive the hard copy, please contact us to let us know. Likewise, do tell us if you know of anyone else who would value receiving this sheet. And during these difficult times, continue to pray, holding in mind those enduring words of Paul: 'now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.'

Phil

Collect and Readings for Mothering Sunday

God of compassion,
whose Son Jesus Christ, the child of Mary,
shared the life of a home in Nazareth,
and on the cross drew the whole human family to himself:
strengthen us in our daily living
that in joy and in sorrow
we may know the power of your presence
to bind together and to heal;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.
Amen.

Old Testament Reading (1 Samuel 1:20-end)

In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, 'I have asked him of the Lord.'

The man Elkanah and all his household went up to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice, and to pay his vow. But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, 'As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, that he may appear in the presence of the Lord, and remain there for ever; I will offer him as a nazirite for all time.' Her husband Elkanah said to her, 'Do what seems best to you, wait until you have weaned him; only—may the Lord establish his word.' So the woman remained and nursed her son, until she weaned him. When she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine. She brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh; and the child was young. Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. And she said, 'Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the Lord. For this child I prayed; and the Lord has granted me the

petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he is given to the Lord.’
She left him there for the Lord.

New Testament Reading (2 Corinthians 1:3-7)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering. Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.

Gospel Reading (Luke 2:33-35)

And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, ‘This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.’

Reflection for Mothering Sunday

Phil Bradford

'It's not fair!' The infamous refrain of childhood is one which those who (like me) are an oldest child, will probably have said often when growing up. It is a well-established fact that oldest children are treated more unfairly than their younger siblings. I still bear the mental scars of that traumatic occasion in 1986 on which I was made to go to school and do maths, whilst my brother and his friend were taken to the Birmingham Hippodrome to watch Postman Pat. The argument that the law said I had to go to school had absolutely no impact on a five-year-old who stubbornly informed his parents that he didn't care if they went to prison, as long as he was able to go on the train and see Postman Pat. In my teens, of course, everything was unfair: how was it that on school trips, my brother went to Antigua and my sister to the United States, whilst I somehow ended up on a canal boat in Shropshire? It did not matter in the slightest that I have always hated beaches and would have died of boredom in Atlanta: it was the *principle* of the thing. Life was unfair and oldest children were the greatest victims.

In retrospect, of course, I realise that my parents treated all of us equally. I also realise how happy my childhood was. I know that many people experience difficult or traumatic times growing up, but for me they were years in which I felt loved, happy and safe. As I look back, I realise now the sacrifices my parents made to ensure that. Mum didn't go back to work until all three of us were at school, which made money tight; clothes were made or handed down, toys were shared and reused, we didn't have a car until I was eight and holidays were spent with family in the north. None of that mattered, because it meant that we had parents around during our early years, that we got to play with our cousins and explore the country, and that walking was ingrained into my existence from the very beginning. I couldn't tell you anything about the clothes or toys I had in the 1980s (things many people today spend so much on), but I remember very well the happiness of home and

appreciate the sacrifices my parents made to give us a secure, happy childhood.

On Mothering Sunday, it is perhaps important to remember those two aspects of motherhood, love and sacrifice, for they are values at the heart of our Christian faith. Mary's story is one which highlights that. She brought Jesus up in love, but then had to do what all mothers do and let her son go his own way. That cannot have been easy, for the path Jesus took was one which exposed him to opposition and danger. In the end, she had to make the bitterest sacrifice of all, as her son was nailed to a cross. Yet even here sacrifice and love intertwined, for in spite of a pain which can be known only to those who face the loss of a child, she kept vigil at the foot of the cross as his life drained away. Here is motherhood at its most agonising and its most poignant, a love which will sacrifice the happiness of self on behalf of another.

And on this Mothering Sunday more than ever, we need to cling to those Christian values of love and sacrifice more than ever and to demonstrate them before the world. These are strange, difficult times and people are frightened. Many of the certainties underpinning our lives have been ripped away. The world needs to see the love of God in the midst of humankind, to know that at the heart of Christianity are those attributes of motherhood shown by Mary and so many mothers across the ages. At this time, the Church needs to reach out to the weak, the vulnerable and the lost. We can all make very practical sacrifices, in simple ways like not stripping supermarket shelves bare. We can all show our love for one another, by helping the isolated shop, by chatting to people on the phone and checking up on them, by little gestures which keep humanity alive. Perhaps we are not sure what the future holds or what is going to happen, but then neither did Mary as she held the infant Jesus in her arms. Sometimes, we must trust that the future is in God's hands, doing what we can in the present to live out his love.

Notices

Prayer

While there are no public services, St John's and St Clement's will be open during the day for those who wish to pray privately or light candles (please do respect government advice on social distancing). For those with internet access, there are many prayer resources on the Church of England website. The clergy and ALMs would also be very pleased to pray with people by phone or online means such as SKYPE; please do get in touch if this would be helpful.

Weddings and Funerals

At present, weddings and funerals are allowed to continue. However, guidance is that weddings must have the minimum legal number present (priest, bride, groom and two witnesses). Advice for funerals is that only immediate family should attend and that anyone in a vulnerable group should not be present. We recognise that this is very difficult; while weddings can be postponed, funerals cannot. We will do our best to deal pastorally with each situation within the limitations of the new guidelines. As funerals have to have small numbers, memorial services can be arranged for after the lifting of the restrictions which would allow everyone to honour the person's life.

Light a Candle of Hope

Churches Together in England are encouraging all Christians to observe a national Day of Prayer and Action this Mothering Sunday. As a visible symbol, they are inviting everyone to light a candle in their windows at 7pm today.

Coronavirus (Covid-19)

Remember to keep up to date with latest government advice, especially on self-isolating and social distancing. The advice is given for a reason. It is not only for your own protection, but for the protection of the most

vulnerable groups in society, so please do not interact with other people if you have symptoms or believe you have been exposed to the virus. If this causes problems, such as with obtaining food, we are available to help; please get in touch if you need help.

Shopping and Local Food Deliveries

Recent days have been very difficult in the supermarkets. We have a team of volunteers who are willing to help with shopping should that prove necessary, and supermarkets are prioritising home delivery for the most vulnerable groups.

The two butchers in St Johns are also offering help. Dayus (01905 422459) are taking orders by phone and are doing free home delivery. Payment can also be over the phone. Narraway (01905 424488) have also indicated that they will do their best to help people who are in self-isolation or struggling to get to the shops at this time.

Food Bank and Maggs

This is a particularly worrying time for the Food Bank and Maggs, who support some of the people most in need in our community. There will be drop-off boxes in St John's between 1pm and 3.30pm each afternoon, should people wish to donate any items for either of these causes.