

A Sermon for Mothering Sunday March 22nd 2020

This is a strange sermon to write.

Usually for Mothering Sunday I would be looking forward to celebrating and preaching in a fuller than usual church, with joy at the church family coming together to celebrate the role of the Mother Church in our lives, as well as the role that others play in our lives.

This year, there will be no gatherings, no posies, no extended family lunches.

So what does Mothering Sunday mean for us this year, on the first Sunday when worship is suspended in the national Church?

Our Gospel reading from John 19 says:

“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.”

At this time of uncertainty and fear, when so many of us are anxious for our loved ones who are far away, for ourselves because we may be vulnerable, and when we feel alone and isolated, perhaps we might turn to this picture of Jesus reaching out to connect people, reaching out to John to provide care for his mother, reaching out to his mother to love John, and bringing people into community together.

Jesus wanted to ensure that his mother, the one who had cared for him and nurtured him, all the while knowing that she would not have him as her son for very long, would herself be cared for and supported when he was gone. He turns to one of his followers to do just that, someone who would be a part of starting the early church.

And this scene of inclusive care and provision in need, all takes place at the foot of the cross, where our worship and our faith begin.

Our faith and our worship do not begin in church buildings, beautiful as they are, our faith and worship begin at the cross of Christ, in community with brothers and sisters of faith around the world.

Jesus gives us, in these few verses, a picture of what the Church is called to be, a community of care, love and support that is not bound by any building, but reaches ever outwards. And as that love is shared more and more widely, others are brought into the community of faith and worship because they experience the love of God in the love of his Church.

Likewise, our passage from Colossians paints that picture of the Church as a loving, supportive, nurturing, boundary setting place where love is at the heart of all actions.

“Above all, clothe yourself with love, which binds all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.”

We have entered a time of great need in our country and our world. And the Mother Church has a role to play in responding with love, with thankfulness for all the good

that we still see around us, and pointing people to the peace that can be found in Jesus Christ, even in the midst of the storms of life.

Can we follow the example of Christ on the cross as he brings people together in community, no matter how far apart they may be physically?

Can we think of the needs of others and find ways to meet those needs?

And can we learn to live out our faith outside the walls of a building, worshipping God wherever we are, knowing that others across the world are doing likewise and that together, in Christ, we are the Church.

This Mothering Sunday, different from any other that has gone before, let's not only remember all who care for us and all who have helped raise us and support us over the years, but let's also take the love shown to us in Jesus, out of our buildings and into the community clothing ourselves with love and BEING the Church to all those who may be in need.

Amen.

As a response to these passages and words, I want to invite you to:

- Create community by continuing to phone and keep in touch with those who may be isolating and especially those who are alone.
- Give thanks for the community spirit you are seeing around you by letting me have any stories of love and support that you have seen or experienced.
- Worship outside the church building. Could you send me any prayers that you have found helpful, perhaps even any prayers that you have written during this time. Likewise, any hymns or songs that you have found particularly helpful or uplifting.
- Find beauty in things that you might previously have overlooked. Could you send a photo or drawing of something that you have found particularly beautiful? A view, a flower, a sunset, an animal, your family, perhaps even a packet of toilet rolls still on a supermarket shelf!

Send them to me at ruthhulse@hotmail.co.uk or post them to: The Team Office, Vowles Close, Hereford, HR4 0DF

I will put them onto the website and Facebook pages to encourage others at this difficult time.

Thank you to everyone who is showing love and care to those around them. Together, we ARE the Church.

Let us pray using prayers from the Church of England website.

Let us pray to God,
who alone makes us dwell in safety:

For all who are affected by coronavirus,
through illness or isolation or anxiety,
that they may find relief and recovery:
Lord, hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.

For those who are guiding our nation at this time,
and shaping national policies,
that they may make wise decisions:
Lord, hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.

For doctors, nurses and medical researchers,
that through their skill and insights
many will be restored to health:
Lord, hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.

For the vulnerable and the fearful,
for the gravely ill and the dying,
that they may know your comfort and peace:
Lord, hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.

We commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray,
to the mercy and protection of God.
Merciful Father,
**accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**