

Hello everyone,

I am sure you are all to aware that it has been a year since COVID-19 started to affect many of our lives. You don't need me to labour the point - we have all had our own struggles in the last year. As Ruth has reminded us, we might all be in the same storm but we are all in different boats. To mark this difficult year there will be a national day of reflection. You might already have seen something about it on the television, in the news or in the papers. It will take place on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March, with a minutes silence at 12pm, tolling bells, and a doorstep vigil at 8pm with sources of light as a 'beacon of remembrance'. You might also like to contact someone you know who has been struggling, perhaps grieving the loss of a loved one or feeling particularly lonely. Sometimes it can help us to reach out and help someone else when we're feeling helpless.

Next week you should also be getting a bumper crop of sermons as we offer some additional material to mark Holy Week. We are all praying that the Easter Resurrection brings with it a return to our church buildings, and gradually a return to some of our cherished ways of worshipping and being a church family.

Here are the Thought for the Day posts from this last week.

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#### March 10<sup>th</sup>:

Daffodils - trumpeting that spring is here. New life once again. No wonder that we decorate our churches with them at Easter.

William Wordsworth out walking on a stormy day with his sister Dorothy wrote the now famous poem:

I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host of golden daffodils.

He, ought, were he alive today, to take a trip along any of the by-roads out of Hereford. For when I see them, like Wordsworth, "my heart with pleasure fills, and dances with the daffodils."

That's resurrection.

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#### March 11<sup>th</sup>:

Our garden pond looks rather un-inviting at the moment. But - the goldfish are beginning to come to the surface after three months in the depths. You can see the wires which hopefully will protect them from the hungry heron.

See in the pond the water lilies, the reeds and the marsh marigolds ready to come to bloom, and amongst them frog spawn in abundance. Give it a month or so, and it will become, if not a well, but a pool of life.

Our pond is for us our Easter Garden - for there we look to Resurrection and beyond. The signs of new life are already showing.

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## **March 12<sup>th</sup>:**

Hadleigh is the eldest of our three cocker spaniels. In doggy years he is 84. I am younger than he is, but am reluctant, if no longer able, to bounce around as he does. I have always had dogs around me, and I feel at one with them when I wear my dog collar. Clergy in this country, of course, did not really begin to adopt the clerical (or dog) collar until the early 1800's. The collar set them apart, intending to indicate a separation from the secular world. We have really done ourselves no favour by that, and I rarely wear my dog collar, preferring a white tie. All priests would wish to affirm that we share the life of the people of the communities in which God has called us to serve.

Jesus said, “I am among you as one who serves.”

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## **March 13<sup>th</sup>:**

Tomorrow is Mothering Sunday, when we remember Mother Church, Mary the mother of Jesus and our earthly mothers

In Medieval times, it was expected that on this Sunday in the middle of Lent everyone would visit their “mother church”, that is the church in which they were baptized. From the age of ten, many children would leave home to go to work either as domestic servants or agricultural workers, and it became the custom for everyone to be given a day off on that Sunday to return to their home church.

The home church was described as mother for many reasons. It was where the person had been given new life in the waters of Baptism. It was a place of safety—in those days anyone fleeing from the authorities could claim sanctuary in a church—and it was a place of nurturing, helping people to grow in faith and comforting them in difficult times. All attributes of “mothering”.

How many people do still regard their local church as “mother” - as a place of new life and nurture and sanctuary? For many our churches are important historical or architectural buildings, but do they mean any more than that to those who do not regularly attend worship? I am always amazed at how many people go into the Cathedral daily, just to sit quietly and be still. And it may well be that our local churches, if they are open during the day, might well welcome more people than we know.

Over the last year our churches have mostly been closed for public worship, and for a time even closed for private prayer, and it is not just regular worshippers who have found this so hard. It will be wonderful to open fully again, and welcome all who seek safety and comfort and nurture to return to a mothering church.

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## **March 14<sup>th</sup>:**

Today is Mothering Sunday, when we give thanks for mother Church, Mary the mother of Jesus, and those who have Mothered us in our lives.

We saw yesterday how from medieval times people were given the day off on this day to return to their home Church - the church where they had been baptised.

And of course, everyone took the opportunity to visit the family too, and it was the custom for young people to gather wild flowers on their way home to take to their own mothers.

And because this Sunday was also “Refreshment Sunday” when Lenten fasting rules were relaxed for the day, families could gather after church to enjoy a festive meal together.

We have had a whole year now during which families have not been able to gather together - we have shown our love for each other by staying apart - and it has given us a chance to really appreciate how much we need each other. We seldom put into words just how grateful we are for the love and care we

have received in our lives - perhaps today is the day to write that letter, type that email, or make that phone call to put it into words.

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### March 15<sup>th</sup>:

Yesterday was Mothering Sunday, when we remember Mother Church, our human mothers, and Mary the mother of Jesus.

What do you think of when Mary is mentioned? Probably a young woman dressed in blue looking very calm and submissive. Most of the images we have of her are like that. I do think we can underestimate the courage and strength of character of this young woman who took an enormous risk in saying yes to God's call.

Marianne Katoppo challenges us to think again:

To many of us, reading or hearing the story of Mary is like reading or hearing a story of which we already know the ending. We know that Joseph is not going to abandon her and that he is not going to throw her to the wolves. The penalty for a betrothed virgin being with child by a third party was, after all, death. We know that everything is going to be alright. Therefore there is not sufficient awe in us at the incredible courage of this young woman, who said what she said: "May it happen to me as you have said."

There is a wonderful 13th century image of Mary punching the devil in the face which speaks of a mother who will protect her son at any cost to herself.

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### March 16<sup>th</sup>:

Hope

In Greek mythology we read the story of Pandora's Box (Jar). When it was opened it released; disease, despair, death, and all the other nasties into the world. Last, out came hope, to follow the nasties and bring hope to suffering humanity.

Rabbi Gryn learned in a Nazi concentration camp that you can live without much food, but you cannot live without hope. Those who had lost hope quickly succumbed.

This is a truth we must hold onto as we continue to travel through these difficult times. That in the words of Captain Sir Tom Moore, "Things will get better."

For the Christian there is the great Easter Hope: that through Jesus, death is not an end, but a gateway into something more glorious.

May we never lose our hope for the future. "That tomorrow WILL be a better day."

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We know that for many of you the uncertainty and anxiety about lockdown restrictions and health continues. We want to continue to remind you that we are here for you. If you need a chat, prayer, or some practical help then do reach out - either by phoning 01432 273086 or by contacting your Pastoral Coordinator.

We hope these resources help you feel connected as we worship as a scattered Church. Please be assured that you are not forgotten and that you are remembered in our prayers.

God Bless,

Ruth and Jo