

Gospel Reading , Reflection and Collect for Mothering Sunday, 22 March 2020 from Prebendary Nigel Guthrie

Reading John 19: 25-27

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 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.

Reflection

For many of us this is going to be a strange Mothering Sunday. Traditionally it is a time when we get together with our families. My mother is in one of the nursing homes that has stopped all visitors for the safety and wellbeing of the residents. So we won't be seeing her or indeed speaking to her as she can't use a phone. All we can do is post a card through the Nursing Home door as a sign of our love for her.

This is just one example of the isolation which many people are feeling today; trips and gatherings called off, phone calls replacing lunches together, skype conversations replacing journeys to see loved ones. We are all having to adapt very quickly to changed circumstances.

But already people are seeing some good in this dark and dangerous situation. Air pollution is falling in many places. Fish are back in the canals of Venice, where the water is cleaner than for a long time. And many communities are getting together for mutual support and friendship. Neighbours are speaking to each other more than usual and some are setting up WhatsApp groups for mutual support.

The Gospel reading I have chosen this morning is one of those suggested for Mothering Sunday. And it might seem to be a rather strange one. Jesus has been nailed to the cross with Mary, his mother, and John, his beloved disciple are standing beside, no doubt looking on in horror, hardly believing what was happening. And then Jesus says 'here is your son' referring to John. And to John he says 'here is your mother' referring to Mary.

Jesus is reimagining what it means to be family. It is not just about blood relations, parents and children, aunts and uncles. Family is about the quality of the relationships we have with one another and the care we show for each other. Mary knew that she would still have a son in John. John knew that Mary would be like a mother to him. 'From that hour the disciple took her into his own home.'

In response to the question 'who is my neighbour?' Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan. And the answer was 'the one who showed mercy'. One of the challenges coming through this gospel passage is for us to ask 'who is my family?'. Who needs my help today? Perhaps through a phone call or a message we can be part of that new family which is being formed? Perhaps that can be our way of showing mercy?

The world envisaged by Jesus was one in which every person found their dignity as a child of God; a beloved son or daughter. When Christians use the cross as a symbol we often think of the suffering of Jesus. And that is powerful as we realise that God came to suffer as one of us. But the cross really stands for the whole life, death and resurrection of Jesus. God is always making new life ready for us whether in this world or in heaven. At the moment we may only see darkness and uncertainty as the global pandemic starts to bite hard in this country. But we do know that God is preparing a dawn for us as surely as the dawn of Easter Day followed the desolation of Good Friday. And even on Good Friday Jesus was at work bringing people together as he is with us, in unexpected ways, today.

Collect

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,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.