

Devotional Blog

Sunday 22nd March 2020

Sunday 22nd March is Mothering Sunday, the fourth Sunday in Lent. It is likely to be the strangest Mothering Sunday that most of us have ever experienced. We will be feeling the effects of social distance and even self-isolation. But we are not alone, we are not forgotten.

Mothering Sunday is often called Mother's Day, yet Mother's Day in the USA, Australia, Canada and a number of other places falls on the second Sunday in May. The campaign to have Mother's Day in the UK was led by Constance Adelaide Smith. She did not want it to be so American and campaigned to bring back the old Medieval Mothering Sunday, so called for on that Sunday you went back to your mother church and hence met up with your own Mother. In the Victorian era, servants and labourers (some as young as ten years old) who worked for wealthy landowners were allowed to see their Mothers on Mothering Sunday. In many rural areas the traditional gift to take home to Mum was a Simnel cake, often with eleven cake balls atop representing the eleven disciples (Judas didn't count!). Simnel cakes have made a recent come back in popularity following being chosen as a test in the Great British Bake Off. The two simple messages of Mothering Sunday are, firstly, that as we remember and give thanks for the love of Mothers, we remember and give thanks for the love of God. Secondly, as we share our Simnel cake, we are reminded to share God's love with others.

There is no other passage in the New Testament that springs to mind when we think of God's love more than John 3:16:

“For God so loved the World that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”

When my good Gideon friend Jonathan Shepherd presents New Testaments at Year 7 school Assemblies, he always explains how vital this verse is for Christians. The setting of this famous verse in our lectionary is John 3:14-21, but its broader context is the story of the night-time visit to Jesus by the Pharisee Nicodemus. Some of you will recall Hazel talking about him a couple of Sundays ago. This context throws up the well-used and often ill-used phrase “born again”. It is interesting to note that the word that is translated into “again” can also mean “from above”. So, the sentence can be read as Jesus telling Nicodemus “I tell you the truth no one can see the Kingdom of Heaven unless he is born from above” (John 3:3). Jesus goes on to say that he is to be lifted up, and that it will be this event that enables believers to be part of the Kingdom of Heaven. The moment we are “born again” or “born from above” is not just the moment when we began to believe but also the point when Jesus was lifted up on the cross. Jesus links his statement back to the Old Testament story of Moses lifting up a snake on a stick to heal the Israelites (Numbers 21:4-9). When he is lifted up on the cross, our Lord saves us. No Cross, no Crown!

But why does God do all this? What’s his motive? It is because: HE SO LOVED THE WORLD! That means all the world. Not just a bit of it. He loved everyone, and he still loves everyone.

We have a choice. It is like this: Jesus is lifted up before us. We can turn him down and ignore him in our lives. Saying “no” to Jesus means that we judge ourselves. We are called to say “yes” we believe; we believe that God is as Jesus declared him to be, not a harsh Judge but a loving Father. We believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the mind of God, is one with God. We believe what Jesus told us is true and that belief should drive every aspect of our lives. When we say “yes” to Jesus we face judgement bathed in the love of God. Amazingly, there is more, a great prize, in fact the greatest prize. We receive Eternal life! John’s Gospel is clear, Eternal life is not

something that is held in abeyance for the believer's future, but it begins in the believer's present. Eternal life is human life as God intended it to be, living our lives in God's presence and love.

Christians will not miss out on the world's problems. We will have our share of grief, hurt and suffering. Yet, in the midst of all the pain and challenge believers have an inner joy. Believers have been blessed with Eternal life. This gives them peace with God. It gives them peace with others, when you are forgiven, you become forgivers. It gives them peace with themselves, they know their weaknesses but face life's difficulties with God. That is what God's love has done for us: Eternal life now and in the future after our mortal death.

So, Brothers and Sisters, on this very challenging and difficult Mothering Sunday, let us remember the love of Mothers, and see the very best of that love as a reflection of God's love for us. Let us share that love, for as we pass on the knowledge of Jesus to others, we share God's love and give them the chance not to perish but to have Eternal life - now!

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