

Lent 4 / Mothering Sunday, March 30th, 2025

3.00 Holy Communion, Brooke

Colossians 3.12-17, John 19.25b-27

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

Mothering Sunday derives from the medieval practice of visiting your “mother church” – the church in which you were baptised. For most people this would have meant a return home to visit family and friends. It’s observance died out somewhat in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries until it was revived by Constance Adelaide Smith in 1913 to honour, as she put it, Mother Church, the mothers of earthly homes, the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus, and Mother Nature. In terms of honouring the Virgin Mary, Mothering Sunday is usually somewhere around Lady Day, the feast of the Annunciation on March 25th, as indeed it was this year, and the Mothers Union often hold Lady Day services. Mother Nature was a term much in vogue around Constance Smith’s time, although perhaps less so now, but Mothering Sunday does still have something of the seasonal remembrance about it – the equinox, and a time when Spring is at its height, and when Mother Nature is at her most beautiful – hence the daffodils!

But it also falls in the middle of Lent, when we follow Jesus and his disciples from the Mount of Transfiguration to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, and the horrors of the week that follows, ending with the crucifixion. And the reading set for today, takes up that aspect, and in it we see Mary at the foot of the cross watching her son die.

So a time of joy and thanksgiving on the one hand, but with a darker side on the other. But perhaps that is fitting as for all our “mothers” as listed by Constance Smith, the light and the dark are intermingled. Mother church is certainly something we should celebrate, a place of joy and safety, but the church has faced periods of darkness, trial and trauma in the past, and the institutional church is certainly in a dark place at the moment. Being an ordinary mother (or father!) is a thing of great joy, but also potentially a role that can be painful, as children make their own way in life, make their own decisions, good and bad. For the Virgin, the joy of the Annunciation and the birth of her child, led to the grief and pain of the foot of the cross. And Mother Nature on days such as today, seems the most benign of parents. But there is another face to her, in the rain and the storms that can cause so much damage and destruction. The light and the dark are intermingled.

But as we consider this rather contradictory festival, we come back to the gospel reading. Here we see, in two short verses, a family in the most difficult of circumstances. But a family that didn’t give up on each other. Jesus’s mother, his aunt Mary, and his closest friends John and Mary Magdalene didn’t run away like the other disciples, but stayed with Jesus, probably putting themselves in personal danger. Jesus, suffering as he was, was nonetheless conscious of the pain of his family, and particularly his mother and spoke words of comfort, and made sure that she would be looked after in the future. John, the

beloved disciple, in his grief, took the responsibility that was placed on him and took Mary into his home. A family that, despite it all, continued to care, to support and to look after each other. A family that continued to love to the bitter end. A family that carried the light of love into the darkest places. From the hymn we all know well

*See from his head, his hands, his feet
Sorrow and love flow mingling down
Did 'ere such love and sorrow meet
Or thorns compose so rich a crown*

Sorrow and love flow mingling down. Some years later, Paul was to write to the family of the Colossian church

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

It is clear that Paul understood that in his churches, as in any family, the light and the dark intermingle, that there will be quarrels and strife, and a continuing need for patience and kindness. and he gives advice that has a general application. Perhaps this Mothering Sunday we can go away holding two things in our mind – the picture of Jesus and his family, in their extremity, refusing to let each other go, and the simple words of Paul, to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, to bear with one another and to forgive each other. To bring light of Jesus into the darkness.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen