

Sermon

22 March 2020

Mothering Sunday

National Day of Prayer and Action

Jesus said: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35). So, since there "we know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So, we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters." (1 John 3:16).

That kind of sacrificial love is the kind we associate with mothers – with their willingness to put their children before everything.

Of the four gospel writers, John is the only one who records Mary's presence at the cross. But it would be expected that Jesus' mother is at the foot of the cross.

Today is Mothering Sunday; a really beautiful Festival for us to celebrate together and one that goes way back into antiquity. This Christian Festival honouring both: the Blessed Virgin Mary and Mother Church. And yet this is a time of thankfulness, remembering especially mothers who have served us, often in very costly ways.

Today is also National Day of Prayer and Action in response to the coronavirus pandemic. "We have the great privilege and freedom to be able to call upon God, wherever we are, individually and corporately, for healing in our nation."

So, today, we kneel at the foot of the Cross with Mary and the disciple John. There is something quite profound about what Mary and the disciple John represent to us here. Two people who believe in Jesus claim to be the Son of God, the Lord and Saviour of the world. When "Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved standing there; so, he said to his mother, 'He is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'She is your mother.' From that time the disciple took her to live in his home." (John 19: 26-27).

A new family is created in the shadow of the cross. Through the blood of Christ shed for us, a new home, a new community comes to life. A new family is born. The Church family. Mary and John formed the church in their relationship with each other. And as we celebrate the Eucharist this morning, we are continuing the work that Jesus started that day: the formation of the church.

Mary and John offered one another comfort. They strengthened each other. They encouraged one another and shared hospitality together. These, surely, must be the hallmarks of our church today: Love, Comfort, Support and Hospitality. This is what Jesus had in mind when he formed the church.

So, we see that Mothering Sunday is so much deeper than we might at first imagine. It is a time to celebrate the love of our Mothers. Because that kind of love is an example of the maternal nature of God's love.

But it is also a time to give thanks for Mother Church, where we find comfort and support and love and hospitality. Because to be a church means to be able to take care for those whose lives have been affected by the outbreak.

I know, that during this time of crisis, it can be tempting to self-isolate. But please remember: lots of things have been cancelled by the coronavirus, but love is not one of them.

We are called to a witness of strength, courage and faith and to be a calm. There are so many ways you can participate in the Christian practice of hospitality without exposing ourselves to risk. We should take the opportunity to telephone or email someone who is isolated, buy some additional food for the local foodbank, or offer to deliver shopping for an elderly neighbour. Families with small children and the elderly in our church need to be served with physical provisions more than ever before.

There's a difference between being afraid and living in fear about coronavirus. It is normal to be afraid of your family, of your friends, of yourselves. But we should not live in fear, because fear paralyzes action.

I know it is not easy to do so. But Scripture calls us not only to be bold but to believe boldly in the midst of crisis: "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4).