

Sunday 11th March 2018
Mothering Sunday (B)

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: 1 Samuel 1.20-28
NT: 2 Corinthians 1.3-7
G: Luke 2.33-35

If you are someone who rages against the commercialisation of Christmas, you may feel entitled to have a good moan about today. The purveyors of greeting cards, chocolates and flowers, restaurants and hotels will make good money as people celebrate Mother's Day. For others, today can be a source of pain and regret.

For those who did not know a loving mother, for those whom motherhood has been denied or snatched away, this Sunday is one to avoid. At the Cathedral there is a service for Mother's Day runaways where presumably the M word is banned and no flowers will be on offer.

But I think they are missing the point. I'm not being pedantic when I insist that today is Mothering Sunday, not Mother's Day. Mothering Sunday is mid Lent Sunday, Laetare, an opportunity offered by the Church to suspend our Lenten fast, to be happy, to remember afresh the love that we experience from our God, Father, Mother, Brother, Sister. Today is a day that all can celebrate, no matter the pain suffered through human relationships, because we are all children of God, all beneficiaries of his amazing grace, all with access to his healing consolation. Or as St Paul puts it

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God.

I was away last week at a conference for work. At dinner on the second night, the person next to me asked how I could reconcile my faith in a loving God with the suffering that I see daily in my work with people who have experienced major traumas. Not what you expect to have to deal with when you're on your second glass of wine and happily tucking into a smoked fish starter. Why do so many people expect God to have formed an

anodyne world free from any misery, a bland creation more aligned to Disney World than to the reality of the human condition with all its highs and lows? I really did not want to launch into a theological debate involving original sin and free will as the roast beef was served but I did want to say that wherever there is suffering, God can be found in the midst of it, walking alongside those who hurt, bringing consolation so that if there is darkness there is always some light too. I definitely see that at work, through the committed care provided by the staff, through the triumphs, small or large, as people make progress in therapy, through the unconditional love of family members determined to make sure that everything possible is done for their loved one.

No parent can guarantee their child have a charmed life, free from disappointment and pain. But they can promise to be a loving presence and source of comfort in the difficult times. This is what we experience from God. Whatever the cause that moved humanity from the bliss of the Garden of Eden to this world we all experience, our God has not abandoned us.

As one prayer in the liturgy says

You fashioned us in your image and placed us in the garden of your delight. Though we chose the path of rebellion you would not abandon your own. Again and again you drew us into your covenant of grace. You gave your people the law and taught us by your prophets to look for your reign of justice, mercy and peace.

This is God mothering us, this is what we celebrate today. And as we have received so should we give.

As we know the God of consolation, as we acknowledge the forgiveness of our sins, as we admit to a life blessed far beyond anything we deserve, so should we promote God's reign of justice, mercy and peace.

We are each other's consolation, wanting to care for each other, finding ourselves able and strong at a time when one of us is in despair and likewise receiving comfort and help when we experience suffering.

But this consolation, this being there with comfort, is not to be confined to within these walls, or only to be shared with other faithful Christians, we are to go out to all our brothers and sisters.

We are called to share the consolation of God with all those who are afflicted. We are not called to judge, even as we have not been judged but to treat all humanity with dignity and respect, to love our neighbours as ourselves.

As we pick up again tomorrow, the disciplines of Lent, you may want to look for a way to share God's soothing grace with someone who is afflicted. This may be through assisting someone you know or through committing to supporting a national or international cause. You may want to suggest something that we can join together with here at St Nick's as a worshipping community through our Church and World Action group.

Whatever you do, it's remembering that you are loved by a God who places no boundaries on his love and who calls us to share that love with all humanity. This is the same God who has carved each one of us on the palm of his hand so that he can never forget us, who wants us to know that no matter what is our personal experience of motherhood, today is a day to celebrate the consolation of God, a day to celebrate our membership of his family, a day to be happy.

on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again, as you also join in helping us by your prayers, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted to us through the prayers of many.

The Revd Michelle Montrose