

The Gift and Cost of Love ...

... yet God's Love is an Unchanging Reality

A reflection given on 22nd March 2020, in the Online Communion Service by the Vicar, the Revd. Canon Jonathan Baker, in Beverley Minster.

Luke 2:33-35

So here we are. All of us stuck in front of our separate screens wondering how to make church work when we're unable to gather together. It's a particular challenge on Mothering Sunday when we want to celebrate our closest and most precious relationships, when families should be together and our sense of the family dimension of church life as a place of growth and nurture is uppermost. The only panic-buying we normally see around Mothering Sunday is in the greetings card shops and the florists.

But Mothering Sunday has always fallen in the middle of Lent, that season leading up to Easter, when we remember Jesus spending 40 days in the wilderness being tested by the devil before beginning his public ministry. It was the original act of social distancing: working out his sense of God's purpose for him at the beginning, Jesus was vulnerable to 'infection' from a whole range of ambitions and desires which could have thrown him off course and taken him in a very different direction. But by deliberately choosing to isolate himself from others, Jesus was able to listen to the conflicting voices inside his own heart and decide which ones to take seriously. In doing so, he came to know his Father in heaven better and to grow in trust and mature faith; by spending time apart, he actually felt more connected; he also came to know and understand himself better.

So maybe this can give us a fresh angle on Mothering Sunday this year. If we're physically unable to be with our families, perhaps we can use the time instead to reflect upon what it is about our nearest and dearest that we most value and appreciate. And whilst it's always nice to get together over a meal, perhaps that isn't the best time to tell someone how important they are or how grateful we are for their love. Maybe being apart from our families on Mothering Sunday could be a good time to think about how much they give us and then write a card or send an email or make a phone call just to say how much someone else means to us.

Mothering Sunday is bigger than just being grateful for our mothers: whilst there is, of course, only one person who gave us birth, there are likely to be others of all generations who have nurtured and protected us or encouraged and taught us, and whatever the state of our human families, they are all part of God's family, the family of the church.

Relations between children and parents aren't always straightforward are they? Loving someone in a sustained way over a lifetime will bring times of pain and sorrow, as well as the sunnier moments. In our gospel reading this morning, Simeon warned Mary that as Jesus fulfilled his calling to be the means of God's salvation in the world, a sword would pierce her soul. Showing love in our imperfect world is costly, especially for parents, whether human or divine. As we get closer to holy week, the cost of love becomes clearer in the shadow of the cross. The pain of separation from our families, which many are currently enduring, is also an expression of love. We're doing it in order to protect one another.

So this Mothering Sunday, we may not be together, but the opportunity to appreciate the gift of love is no less. Whatever your family circumstances, you are loved with an unflinching love, a costly love, the love of one who gave you life. Being separated from others may make us more aware, both of our need for love and also of the fact that God's love is an unchanging reality.

May God bless you during this time in the wilderness, and in your time alone, may you draw closer to Him; may you see just how much you have received; and may you find in this time an opportunity to be strengthened in your relations with others, not least in the church family, and find ways to express gratitude for the gift of one another within the love of God.

Reading Texts

Luke 2:33-35

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."