

SUNDAY REFLECTION FROM THE VICAR – 22nd March (Mothering Sunday)

These are strange and unsettling times. Usually, today, churches would be meeting together, as families across the land would be thankful for the gift of human motherhood. Mothering Sunday was traditionally the day when young people who had left home to go into domestic service or apprenticeships (sometimes as young as ten years old) would be given a day off to return to their family and attend their 'Mother Church'. On their way home they would collect posies of wild flowers as a gift for their mothers. So in a way Mothering Sunday has always been about finding ways to remember that we are linked together as one family even when we are separated.

Although we worship separated from one another as members of the Theydon Parishes, let us not give up on worship or our spiritual life. The buildings are open for prayer, and depending on how long the situation lasts there will be a range of aids and prompts to prayer available. Red Balloon Family who have been leading the work with children and young people at St Mary's Theydon Bois are working on making groups available online and more details of these will follow.

The reading from John's Gospel (19.25b-27), shows us that being the mother of Jesus was for Mary no easy task. She experienced the trauma of being present at the end of Jesus' earthly life as well as at its beginning. And yet, in that moment, Jesus reimagines community, "Woman, here is your son" he says from the cross, speaking not of himself but his disciple who stood with her. In Jesus, community is transformed, and family grows beyond the bounds of genetics. Let us pray together, and be ready to be the answer to that prayer ourselves, that in these unique and challenging times our communities maybe transformed for the better.

The pattern of readings we follow in the Theydon Parishes is called the Lectionary. Usually there are three readings set per Sunday, one from the Old Testament, one from the New Testament and one from the Gospels. A long time ago, I had chosen Colossians 3.12-17 to be the first reading, and it seems particularly poignant now. At the beginning, it calls the fragile new church in Colossae 'God's chosen ones, holy and beloved'. At a time when people may be feeling lonely, isolated or fearful, what could be more powerful than remembering that God has chosen each of us as a precious

individual, that we are beloved and he has called us out specially to follow him in our own unique way. And then the writer goes on to tell us how to get dressed. The first thing that is needed is the underwear of compassion on top of which comes the t-shirt of kindness, the socks of humility, the jumper of meekness and the trousers of patience. We are going to need all those things to wear over the next few months, whether we are cooped up at home and noticing just how annoying some of our loved one's habits are, or waiting in queues for things in short supply, or dealing with people whose worlds are falling apart and who are taking it out on other people.

It's not going to be easy to keep it up. And that's why it's really important that we put on the last piece of clothing that Paul mentions – the overcoat of Love which binds everything together in perfect harmony (v.14); the only thing that can keep us really warm and stop all those other good qualities disintegrating and falling apart.

Tonight (Sunday 22nd March), our Archbishops have asked us all to join in a moment of prayer for the nation. At 7p.m. please consider lighting a candle and putting it in your window, as a sign to the community of Jesus Christ, the light of life, our source and hope in prayer. For as followers of Jesus, our hope is to be found in the God who walked the earth, died at the hands of human beings and miraculously was restored to life and lives today, and is present by the Spirit. This God is one who as a nation we may have forgotten, but today, let us remember Jesus who is both refuge through the storm and hope for the world.