

Luke 13.1-John 19.25b-279

9 Eucharist BVM 10.45 SS Mothering C 31 March

Mothering Sunday - Note it's not 'Mother's Day'.

Of course we remember Mothers, with joy, and sadness.

We try to be inclusive today - to make a space in which everyone can find a connection, allow their emotions and feelings to be safe.

So with joy, we can be thankful for the mothering we've received, and that which we are able to give.

But the list of things that make people sad today is much longer. That's why I prayed that prayer at the beginning.

I miss my mum, she died ten years ago.

Yesterday I was with a woman whose only child died last year at the age of thirteen. What do we say to her?

Why does the day go so deep?

Okay, what does mothering mean? What are the things that we celebrate?

All these, of course.

Many of them ... 'nurturing' are done by others.

I feel that I nurtured my children as much as Lizzie did.

But the one thing that mothering means that fathering never can, is that you have been truly part of one another.

It's not just a relational connection, but physical.

The womb space becomes the presence of the unborn.

And that space is shared in a way that no other relationship can have - a physical sharing in enabling life, and being alive.

Mother, child are one.

Debbie, Jane and I are thinking about worship for mini-series in June. One thing we're reflecting on is how worship space is arranged in a church.

This reflects on how our relationship God is considered and portrayed.

Remember Eucharistic worship began in the catacombs, driven underground by persecution, believers used the coffins of saints as an altar. This is why we have altars the shape we do, and why often there would be a relic embedded in them, and the dedication of a church to a particular saint.

And through the first six centuries there was generally one space in which to gather and worship.

Then rood screens became common, a separation of the priestly area from that of the people.

Because God was *up there* ... in the real presence of the body and blood of Jesus. And only the priest was good enough for that. Not you lot.

This encouraged a feeling of unworthiness, and being only let in by when the priest says so.

In Victorian times, God was English, and mighty, and powerful, and fatherly - just like the British Empire. So (as at SS) we have steps up to the chancel, where choristers did the job of

worship for us. And we were allowed, eventually, to ascend into the holy of holies to kneel before God, and be overshadowed in the glory of God as enabled by the riches of the Empire, and the good lives of great men ... usually men ... who had given so much to the church.

It's about separation and not being worthy.

And this idea is still with us, people feel that God is out there, up there, more like a stern Dickens character. God is at a distance, and only a part of us at certain times ... when we've been good enough.

Now many folk still love this, and there can be a real sense of awe and wonder as you approach the reredos and kneel.
And we shouldn't lose that.

But in more modern times things have changed: out of this hard, separatist, exclusive theology has emerged a softer, more inclusive one. And I think it's stronger.

God is grace, unconditional love. God is present, abiding, here - we are part of God and God is part of us.

And modern church buildings reflect this - Abbey eg.
Because at the heart of this is an understanding of what church ... or temple means.

We looked at this in Lent group this week.

I read a quotation from Fr Laurence Freeman, head of the World Community of Christian Meditation ...

The word contemplation contains the word 'templum', or Temple. Today we envisage this as a religious building. But the original meaning was not the physical structure but the pure space itself - before the building was erected ...

1 Cor 3 - 'Do you not know that you are the temple of God and God's spirit dwells in you.'

So we are space. Not just containers of amazing thoughts and imagination, neural pathways and complex biology We are the spaciousness of God.

We are the spaciousness of God ...

In the depths of what it means to be us, we both hold God within us, and we are held within the womb of creation.

We are at one with God, and the whole of creation is God's temple.

This is wonderful, because to the ancients, the Temple was the place of divine rest. So God rests, resides, abides, in both us and creation. So, in Genesis, in the first creation poem on the seventh day - God rests ... not because God is puffed out - how could that be?! - but because having created, God becomes a part of it - rests in it ...

In an essay by David Buller, he writes,

This interpretation also helps us see the value and goodness of creation, for it is the world itself that serves as God's "cosmic temple" ... day seven reveals the greater meaning of creation - the physical aspects of creation serve humanity's needs, but the creation as a whole serves as a cosmic temple for God.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus, in the agony of the cross

only has compassion for his mother, and friend.
'Here is your mother ... here is your son'.
As he dies, Jesus is saying, you are part of each other.
You are one.

We are relational beings, because we are a part of one another. Who is my neighbour? All people.
How should we love God? With all we are.

How are we stewards of creation?
Jesus says, Humanity, here is your mother earth, and mother earth, here are your children.

It's not just US HERE and 'The Environment' out there.
We are part of the life of the earth, and all that's in it.

We are being called to consider our stewardship of the earth, not as a theoretical exercise, not just because we need to be good - but because we are a part of things, we are defined by one another, we are intricately and intimately connected.

There is a climate emergency, and it's said that we are the first generation to be aware of climate change, but the last to be able to do something about it. Read the IPCC report, I'll send it out next week. Things need to be changed. That's why I'm so pleased Bath council has voted to make Bath carbon neutral by 2030.

When a whale dies after eating 40kg plastic - we feel part of its dying, and we are part of its death, because we share the same space, in which God rests.

When we learn that, ultimately, our lifestyles and choices about plastics and energy use won't be enough, but that it needs multi-national corporations to take their heads out of the sands about the use and abuse of fossil fuels - it's a turning away from the voice of the wealthy and powerful, to the whisper of God's presence in a dying creation.

Yaconelli - story of being with the religious in New York, busy lunchtime in the financial quarter - Religious says, 'wait! Listen!' Yaconelli hears nothing strange - they go to a small patch of grass on which is a bush - suddenly he hears the steady sound of a cricket. The religious then asks for some change, which he drops on the pavement, the tiny jingling causes everyone to look. It's about what we're tuned in to.

We are the spaciousness of God, in our prayer and worship.
All the connection that mothering symbolises - the joy of relationship and giving, and the sadness of longing, or missing ... that's what our relationship with Christ can hold ...
For we have shared the same womb, and God rests in us as in him, but the abiding of the Holy Spirit ...