

MOTHERING SUNDAY READING AND TALKS PART 1 & 2

31 MARCH 2019



TALK PART 1

There is a famous Christian book to help find our purpose in life – and the title is fairly obvious – “The Purpose Driven Life”. It was in the best seller lists for a long time and sold millions of copies. Many of us in St Jude’s have used it’s 40 Day approach to reflect on who we are and what life is about. But for those of us who have read the book, the news that it was generally sold in the “Self-help” sections of bookshops is amusing – the first four words of the book are: “It’s not about you.”

In many ways, it is the same for Mothers’ Day – or rather as it should be, Mothering Sunday. It’s not about us.

Historically it is about remembering our Christian roots and the Church that supported us. The early church tradition was to return, on the fourth Sunday in Lent, to the Mother Church, the one that was a special home where our faith was formed, for a special service. And that often meant, for those who had gone away to work, a reunion with their own Mums too. Therefore, the connection to earthly Mothers did evolve and became a fairly obvious link, but it wasn’t the purpose.

So that’s Mothering Sunday – but what about Mothers Day? Well... that was created in America...

In the American Civil War there was a lady called Ann Jarvis who cared for wounded soldiers on both sides and created Work Clubs to help in areas of Health. Ann died in 1905, and her daughter Anna Jarvis began a campaign to make “Mothers Day” a holiday to remember the charitable work among soldiers and veterans her mother had initiated. The first Mother’s Day gathering was in a church in West Virginia in 1908 and by 1911 most of the USA was observing it. Then, and it only happens in America... in 1912 Anna Jarvis trademarked the phrases “Mothers Day” and “The Second Sunday in May” – which happens to be when it is celebrated in USA.

But... by the 1920's, a well-known gift card manufacturer, still known today, Hallmark Cards, began selling Mother's Day Cards. Anna thought it was moving from her intention to honour the charitable work of her mother's initiative and that they were just profiting by commercializing and reorienting it. So, Anna Jarvis started organizing boycotts of Mothers Day - and sued Hallmark Cards!

So what is it today? Hmm...

I think one thing we can say is it's still not really about us, it's about other people or places – though of course a Mother Church is still just people, people who cared for us and raised us up to know the best Parent we all have, our father in Heaven – God.

So today, let's think about anyone who has *cared for us or loved us – or maybe helped and guided us in our faith.*

You have some sticky heart shaped notes. When you have written on them, if you want to - anyone you want to be thankful for - it might be a Mum or Dad, it might be a special Teacher or a Sports Coach, it might be close friend, it might be someone in the church where you grew up or the church where you found out how much God loves you. It doesn't matter who they are, they shared something of themselves in love to help you because deep down in each of us we have this thing called love we've inherited from our heavenly parent, the God who loves us and who is Love.

Once you have written out your names on the hearts, if you want to, please do just bring them up and stick them on our 'tree'.

READING: Psalm 1:1-3 (NLT)

Oh, the joys of those who do not
follow the advice of the wicked,
or stand around with sinners,
or join in with mockers.

² But they delight in the law of the LORD,
meditating on it day and night.

³ They are like trees planted along the riverbank,
bearing fruit each season.

Their leaves never wither,
and they prosper in all they do.

TALK PART 2

Young people have a craft moment now to make a Tree like this one during Talk Part 2...



The Garden where Adam and Eve started out in Genesis Ch 2 included two named trees, one is very well known because of a certain apple - the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. But the second was just as important - the Tree of Life. God told them they can eat the fruit of any tree in the Garden, except one – the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil – eat that one and you will die God said.

As we heard in Psalm 1 – those who delight in the law of the LORD... are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do. This tree that never fails is mentioned in several places in the Bible, here in Psalms, in the books of Ezekiel and Jeremiah and in the description of Heaven in the last book of the Bible, Revelation.

It is **A** tree of life.

In all its locations, it always has its roots fed by being near water. In Ezekiel 47 we're told where that water comes from – in a vision - of water flowing from the Temple, the place that describes the presence of God. This life that comes, that feeds the tree, whose leaves never wither is filled with Love, because God is Love.

We can also re-distribute the Love of God in our loving service and care for others. This morning we have already remembered some people who have done that for us. You could say it's built into our DNA as people made in the image of God. Sometimes we repress it and don't always act lovingly, but God will always act lovingly.

But, there is a third 'tree' in the Bible and it is also a Tree of Life. In most of the traditional Bible translations we hear about this tree as one where God showed his love the most. So, what is this other tree?

Well God, as the perfect parent also sees that when we forget about Him we start to do stuff we shouldn't. We forget our heavenly parent and live our lives as we want to and often forget the good advice he's given... advice only given to keep us safe. We call that 'Sin'.

The other tree is the Cross.

1 Peter 2:24 - ESV and in many traditional translations it speaks of the cross as 'the tree': *"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed"*

By His wounds we have been healed.

Sadly, we don't all have the ability to remember our parents or maybe one or both of our earthly parents weren't that loving, but our Father in heaven is the perfect parent. He will always love you. He will always want to protect you. He longs for each of us to return home to him. He loved us so much he took the pain of death on himself.

The reason for death is the sin, our desire at times to deliberately go against our Father in heaven and to move away from him. But the image of Eden, of the place where we are built to live forever, the place that bookends the Bible in Genesis at the beginning of time and Heaven in Revelation at the end of time, that is the place where the Tree of Life belongs. If we choose, as did Adam and Eve, to ignore our Heavenly Father, he allows us to move away and leave behind the Tree of Life.

But when He himself decided it was time to take the blame for all our sin as a gift to us, to die in our place on that other tree – to defeat death on our behalf - on the Cross - he opened the gate to Eden once more through his son, Jesus – the one also known as The Gate. He offers us that opportunity to return to him every moment of every day. He longs to fill us with his love so we can then give it away to others.

The Tree of Life is not static, it has leaves that never wither and fruit – fruit that is always available. We can take on that love - and give it away as love - when we connect ourselves to the source of life that is our Father in Heaven. Like the leaves that are hearts in our image today, we can constantly shed that love, we can care more for those around us - because we can be filled with the same love that God has for each of us.

He knows that like most kids, as we grow we move away at times, but a bit like Mothering Sunday – he also hopes we will come home to His Church, the global Church of Jesus Christ, also known as the Bride of Christ - a sort of heavenly Mother.

The Church is what God calls his people to all over his planet.

Sometimes those folk who gather together do it well and sometimes they don't. Sometimes they show beautifully how God has changed them - and sometimes, sadly, they don't. But **the** Church is the vehicle that God chose to build to show his love to his world. He calls it the Bride of Christ.

We have the perfect Father in heaven. We also have, an at times imperfect, but heavenly created Mother – God’s Church.

This morning, as we gather within one of those imperfect communities of people that God calls his Church, we can know the love that God has for us, we can accept it, we can decide to gather more regularly with his people to be helped to stay close to Him.

On behalf of your Father in heaven - this Mothering Sunday...

Welcome to your Mother Church!

Always feel free to come home at any time as you will always have a warm welcome.

As we sing in a minute, I’m going to invite the young people, **if** they have finished their craft, to maybe take their images of that tree filled with love back to you for your home.

If they’re not quite finished, its OK to stay there or go back afterwards

(By the way - It works really well in a window with the light shining through showing the branches.)

Perhaps the image of a Tree, either one of these small ones or the ones we see every day as we go about our lives, maybe the trees can be a reminder of the love that God has for you of the love he has placed within His Church all around the planet.

That older tradition of ‘going home to the Mother Church on Mothering Sunday’ isn’t a bad one after all....

Welcome home.

Tim Smith
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