

A sermon for Mothering Sunday 2020 by Deacon Nick Quanrud.

Today is Mothering Sunday. Traditionally a day of celebration, as early as the 16th century people would return on this the 4th Sunday of Lent to their Mother church, their local parish, or to the church where they were baptised - it was a day to return to a familiar place, the place which feels most like home. Eventually this day has become one on which people visit their mothers, or perhaps where they remember their mothers. It is a day to celebrate that most ordinary and yet extraordinary bond, that of a spiritual home and its occupant, or of a mother and child.

And yet, the times in which we live are more extraordinary than they are ordinary. There is nothing familiar about this Mothering Sunday at all.

These are indeed strange times. Strange to be standing here, preaching to a near empty church, not looking into the eyes of my brothers and sisters in Christ, but into the eye of a camera. Strange that the doors of the church are locked, strange that worship is no longer public. Where once this magnificent building was filled with incense, songs, people of all ages and races, it now sits empty. These are indeed strange times.

So strange are these times, that some of us are not able to visit our mothers, however much we might wish to. Social distancing and self-isolation: two phrases which we have heard a great deal about recently, and which now seem to determine this new reality to which we all must adjust. While we know it is the best thing for us, it just doesn't feel right— it goes against our most basic Christian instincts —that at a time when our friends and loved ones might be at their most vulnerable we should be told not to see them, to leave them alone in isolation. We are all no doubt disorientated and confused, at very the beginning of a process of adjusting to a new way of living.

In our gospel reading today, we hear the story of Jesus restoring the sight of a man blind from birth. A blind man in Jesus' day is one who would have been well versed in social distancing, though not of his own volition, and who would have been something of an expert in isolation, one pushed out onto the margins of society. The wide-held belief was that a person was blind because of their sin, they weren't allowed to become priests, and often they were left to beg for a living.

When Jesus encounters one such man, he heals him, and his disciples' ask him a question:

'Rabbi, who sinned that this man was born blind. Was it this man or his parents?'
Who is to blame? Why did this happen?

Jesus gives them an answer they weren't expecting:

'This man was born blind so that the works of God might be revealed in him.'

Jesus isn't interested in his disciples' petty squabbles- he knows that pointing the finger of blame only leads to more suspicion and hatred. Jesus is focused on the purposes of God. Each of us- more aware now of our own vulnerability than perhaps ever before -each one of us is created in order that the works of God might be revealed in us.

If being a Christian means anything at all then it means something at times such as these. Our world is descending deeper into darkness, and yet we are called to be children of light. Be kind to one another, help others where you can, be disciplined in taking every precaution, pray for the sick and vulnerable, accept help when you're offered it. Know that by doing so you are holding a light up to the darkness: the very light of Christ. When we pray, when we serve others, when we love our neighbour, that's when we reveal to others the works of God, we make manifest that which

does not pass, and that from which nothing can separate us: the unending grace and mercy of God.

These are indeed strange times, but they, like all things, shall pass. God is faithful. On this Mothering Sunday let us trust that God will bring us out of this wilderness, this exile, this isolation. Let us look for a day when we can return to our spiritual homes, to our loved ones, to some sense of familiarity. But until then, in the midst of these strange times, we live as children born not only of earthly mothers, but as those born by water and the spirit.

Shine as a light in the world, to the glory of God the Father.

Amen