



## THOUGHTS FOR MOTHERING SUNDAY

14 MARCH 2021

*Love in a time of trial*

John 19:25b-27

Well, here we are again! Mothering Sunday. The first of my 'Sunday thoughts' during this plague-time were penned for this Sunday last year (though it was 22 March then and I produced something for both morning and evening!), and I have just read through them again, partly to avoid repeating myself, and partly to see if I have learned anything from the past year.

The thing that strikes me most forcibly is that my theme last year was the constancy of God's love, entirely reliable even when other 'loves' may fail or dim, and that nothing in the past year has led me to think anything other than that remains true. We have seen examples without number of people's caring exertions bringing comfort and relief to those who suffer, but we have also seen cases where hardness of heart have magnified suffering and misery.

In the Lent course, *Living His Story*, that some of us are following this year, we have been encouraged this week to consider how Jesus, in his encounters with others, always gets to the heart of the matter. He expresses true empathy for the person with whom he is speaking because he has entirely engaged with them, because he has genuine love for them. The people he is meeting are of all sorts and conditions, from the rich and powerful, to the spurned and outcast, but he engages with them all at a profound level. Of course, we might dismiss this, thinking it is all right for him with his special gifts and divine insight, but I think he is using his human abilities to get alongside people and come into genuine communion with them, and this is something all of us can do, if only we give time to it. So this is one thing I think I may have learnt during this past year, it is worth working out what are the most important things about life, where it is really best to invest time and effort.

Perversely, you might think, an overloaded Intensive Care Unit, is not the place where time is available for any of this 'getting alongside the patients', and I am sure there must have been times in some of them over this past year where staff have become exhausted, but the overall testimony is of extraordinary efforts being made to bring the full force of human love into those places of extremis, and that is something to be cherished.

Today's gospel reading from John has Jesus, in agony on the cross, with his heart full not of his own mortality, but going out to his mother and 'the disciple whom he loved' and commending the one into the care of the other. There are many examples of less public, but perhaps no less extreme cases where 'ordinary' people demonstrate amazing compassion and love for their neighbour, even to the point of self-sacrifice and I would be surprised if we cannot all think of examples from our own experience. Sometimes they come in a moment of crisis, but quite often they require self-sacrifice extended over years, as when someone devotes themselves to the care of an ailing spouse or child with a long-term illness. In all these cases we see manifest the operation of love, which is at the heart of Mothering Sunday, as it is at the heart of all life.

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