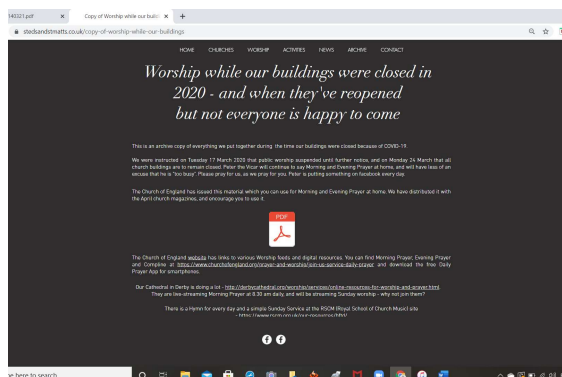


MOTHERING SUNDAY SERMON – 14 MARCH 2021 Exodus 2.1-10, Colossians 3.12-17



In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The fourth Sunday in Lent. Traditionally the day servants were allowed off to return home and see mother. Mothering Sunday please, not Mother's Day.

It is the first Sunday we didn't worship in our buildings a year ago. The first Sunday we were closed. I was self-isolating as I had been on the phone to the GP on Friday morning about my blood pressure, and I had coughed. He had told me in no uncertain terms that I was not taking Olivia and Kieron's wedding that afternoon – so Archdeacon Chris stood in for me on two hours' notice – and I was told to stay in, and stay as far away from Julie as possible. In my dairy I wrote "It seemed ironic that, the year I don't have to take a Mothering Sunday service, I can't cuddle up with my wife as we're in separate beds!" I posted my sermon, and Clive (the swot) posted two sermons on the website. Little did I think we would still be posting services and sermons on the website a year later, and zooming too. If I'm not careful I get sad, upset and angry at a wasted year, and at everything else that annoys me.



The finding of Moses, probably by Francesco Zugno, 1709-1787

So let's go forget a miserable English spring, and go to Egypt, to meet a young lady called Jochebed. The Old Testament reading – "A man from the house of

Levi went and married a Levite woman” – Moses mother, a woman named Jochebed. The child was hidden because the Egyptians had realised how many children their Israelite slaves were having, and had decided that all male children should be killed. A little more extreme than “All these foreigners, coming over here, having babies”, but still the same basis of fear and hatred. I expect that all of us were pleased and excited when our children were born – we have never known that level of fear, that you have given birth to a baby whose life is in danger, that someone will take your baby and kill it. Jochebed hid him, then placed him in a basket, in the hope that he would be found and taken care of – and Miriam the daughter was told to keep watch. I remember this as a picture on the wall of my Sunday School room – a lovely picture, happy baby, reeds beside the Nile, glamorous princess, attentive sister. I suspect the reality was somewhat different, but for Moses it all goes well. What a great start in life – and when God called him to lead his people out of slavery, Moses had that way in to pharaoh and the life of the court, the ability to speak, the ability to lead. All because Jochebed had refused to let her baby be taken by those who would kill it.

So am I enthusiastic and joyful about Jochebed, Miriam and the way baby Moses was saved, or do I get depressed that 3,000 years later mothers are still having to make huge sacrifices for their children – there will be mums today who have to abandon their babies because they cannot afford to feed them, there will be parents having to leave the children they love to find work, there are families trying to keep their child safe, and many who will not succeed.



It depresses me that, 3000 years later, race, the colour of a person’s skin, is still an issue. I’ve also found it difficult this week, reading the reaction to the killing of Sarah Everard. My daughter lived in Clapham for several years, and I have read her comments, and the comments of so many of her generation, about feeling unsafe on the streets. I’m a man, I’ve always lived in places that feel safe, I have rarely had to think about the risks of being outside after dark – and now I find out how frightened my little girl and her friends are, on a regular basis. I want to be a better, safer, country – but it feels we are getting nowhere. Add to that the fact that Mothering Sunday is a day which is tough for us – and there’s a large part of me that wants to go back to bed, rather than trying to say anything that is positive and sensible.



But our second reading is from Paul's letter to the Colossians – and you don't come much more positive than this. He is concerned with the gifts that church people, that all human beings, need. "God's chosen ones", need the very best of qualities – "compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience". I regularly use this reading at weddings, and we have twenty of those still in the diary for 2021 – 7 in St Matthew's and 13 at St Edmund's, so we're going to need to help and support as we welcome so many. Some of them are still in the diary in the time when we have limits on numbers and what we can do – but most are after the end of June.



When I use this lesson at a wedding, I say to the bride and groom that your marriage will need all of those - compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience. But God also talks about forgiveness, when they, when we, don't come up to standard, when mistakes are made.

Clothe yourself in love, work for the harmony – their marriage needs it, our lives, our marriages need it. "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" – peace is not just the absence of noise, peace is shalom, wholeness, the opposite of the dis-ease, the noise, chaos and evil, that we are surrounded by.



Be thankful says Paul – and I remind couples to remember to tell each other that they are. How often do those of us who’ve been married for decades fail to tell our beloved just how much we appreciate them – Mothering Sunday is not just the day for my kids to send their mum a card, it is also a day for me to tell the mother of my children just how grateful I am for her love. And not just the people we live with, but be thankful for everything. Even in the chaos and evil of 2021 – as chaotic and evil as every other year – find the shalom, the peace, and be thankful.

We live in a world that needs harmony and peace. That is in short supply at the moment – our world is out of kilter with the love and purpose of God, and we need to bring harmony and peace into this world – so be thankful, and say so, and care for each other.

Paul tells the Colossians to let Christ’s word dwell in them richly. In this church we proclaim God’s love, we seek to serve each other and our community, we worship the God of love, we come together to deepen that love. I thank wedding couples for coming and getting married in our churches, after all there are plenty of other places they could go, and I assure them they are always welcome here.



I didn’t think that a year ago I’d be keeping contact with people by phone and email, that we’d be rambling on facebook and worshipping on Zoom. It is a funny old world, but we know that God is with us.

Put prayer up

Last week we used the post-communion prayer, despite the fact we didn't have communion. This week we'll do the same – even though I really want to physically share the sacrament, the imagery is gorgeous. Despite the evil of this week, the evil of the year, we have tasted God's goodness, so let's pray together:

Loving God,
as a mother feeds her children at the breast
you feed us in this sacrament with the food and drink of eternal life:
help us who have tasted your goodness
to grow in grace within the household of faith;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.