

Mother's Day 2021, John 3:14-21

May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
Amen.

Today is "Mother's Day"!

The day when we remember, mothers. I confess that I am having a problem with Mother's Day this year. It's not that I don't like Mother's Day or that I disagree with it.

My problem is ... that Mother's Day is for me, a difficult day, particularly this year.

Why? because last year, although my mum died when I was 13, I still had both my dad and my step mum, and was able to send a Mother's Day card, and I remember how we spoke on the phone. But in the past 9 months, I have lost them, both. I am now an orphan, without any parents, and yes, I am lucky I got to my late 50s before that happened but it's still sad and poignant. Even if you have your parents, and grandparents, it can still be hard to participate in Mother's Day. Because while Mother's Day can be a very happy, joyous day for some, it can also be a very sad day, a day of pain & grief for others and so not everybody looks forward to Mother's Day for various reasons.

Today we would normally all be in church celebrating, singing, and offering thanks not only in Worship but acknowledging that the 4th Sunday of Lent is a day when we show our gratitude to our mothers, grandmothers, and women in general. The children usually give out posies of spring flowers, but instead because of the situation we find ourselves in regarding the Covid-19, we are restricted in how we can worship together.

Mother's Day is normally a day for greetings, expressions of love and it is also a day for remembering. I do not believe that anything has ever been said or ever will be said that is powerful enough or expressive enough to articulate the true value of those who are chosen to be mothers.

Motherhood is a special gift from God, to some, but not to all, and the whys and wherefore of this remains a mystery. I once read that something miraculous happens when a woman gives birth to her first child. For in a way there are really two births. The first of course is the birth of a child and then there is the birth of a mother.

When I was preparing to write this sermon, I read that as we go through different stages of our lives, we relate to our mothers differently:

I remember that when she first learnt to talk, my Emma used to say all the time, "Cuddle mummy".

At age 6, we say... "My mummy.... She can do anything!"

At age 12, ... "Well ... Mum doesn't know..... Everything."

At age 15, ... "Mum doesn't know... Anything!"

At age 25, ... "Well, mum.... knows a few things."

At age 35, "Before we decide to do that, ... let's get Mum's ...opinion."

And then as we get older "I wish I could talk ... with my mum."

A mother can have the angelic voice as she gently sings a lullaby to the baby in her arms. Yet this same voice can dwarf the sound of a drill sergeant when she cheers her children on at school's sports day.

When we think of Jesus, as he hung on the cross, we remember that, even then he was thinking of Mary, his mother.

One of the last things Jesus did on earth was to take care of His mother.

Even in the dying moments of His life, He never stopped loving her. He never stopped caring for her.

Hanging on the cross, Jesus told John the disciple whom He loved that Mary was now his mother and in turn he, John, was now her son.

In that moment, Jesus made a declaration that made the arrangement binding and this formally placed his mother under John's protection, requiring John to provide for Mary after Jesus' death.

I think here, Jesus was acknowledging that Mothers are important.

But we are also well aware, that for whatever reason, some women are not Mothers. Likewise, for whatever reason, some people are not able to have a relationship with their mother and some mothers are bad or cruel.

Although my own mother passed away many many years ago, I still have precious memories of her which flood my mind. I continue to remember her daily and to love her.

Grandparents too can be extra special. When a group of young children were asked what makes a grandparent? Here are some of their responses:

- Grandmothers are old so they should never run.
- When they read to us, they don't skip parts of the story or mind if it is the same story over again.
- Everybody should try to have a grandmother because they are the only grown-ups who have time.

Most of us have fond memories of mothers and grandmothers. But this year things will be very different as we have had to distance ourselves from each other for so long. Many of us, who still have parents and grandparents, will not be able to visit and see them. This may be hard.

So today is the day for children- young and old, to tell their mother and their grandmother(s) how much they love and appreciate them.

And today is also for those, like me, whose mothers are no longer with us to look back and remember those cherished memories and all that they gave us and did for us.

We are now halfway through Lent. It is a good time to ask ourselves if we have any areas of our lives which we need to change, if you haven't done so already, it's not too late to embrace a change for the rest of Lent.

It's good that for today's reading we have the passage, from John's Gospel John 3 verse 16 is one of the most famous, if not the most famous passage in the Bible, it reads:

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life'.

This is many people's favourite bible verse.

And rightly so for it is at the very heart of the Gospel, the good news of Jesus. It's a favourite because it tells us about the free gift which God gives us. The free gift of eternal life, to all who believe.

We read 'For God so loved the world' and this tells us that God is love, God created the world and every living thing in it that includes you and me.

It doesn't matter who you are - white, black, rich, poor, young, old, mother father, brother sister, only child, orphan - God loves you.

In fact, he loves each one of us so much that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.

Earlier in the chapter Jesus is having a conversation with Nicodemus, through this encounter, Jesus tells us that the way to eternal life is by taking the gift being offered to us. All we have to do is to believe in the giver of the gift, Jesus and take the gift he offers us- the gift of eternal life.

But what is eternal life?

Eternal life means escaping the power of death. Everything that lives will die. Physically, there is no way to escape it.

But death wasn't the end of the story for Jesus - God brought Him back to life through the resurrection on Easter Sunday. In the same way, death isn't the end of the story for us.

Eternal life is the kind of life that results from a close, loving relationship with our heavenly Father and His only Son.

Eternal life is a life that is full and free and forever.

- It is peace, joy, and assurance.
- It is comfort, strength, and hope.
- It's never-ending life with God, life in heaven after we die, but it's also abundant life here and now.
- It's the kind of life, that I hope all of us really want.
- It's the kind of life we can never achieve on our own. It's the kind of life God gives us for free when we finally admit how much we need His help.

The gift of eternal life, and how can we accept that gift?

We just need to open our minds and our hearts to Jesus and let him in, put simply, it's as easy as that!

Today is a day for opportunities, it's a day to accept the gift of eternal life that Jesus freely offers us, it's a day for love and reflection as we celebrate Mother's Day, and it's the day, half way through Lent, where we have the chance to regroup, assess how it's gone so far and decide how we are going to use the time left to reflect and be penitent as we move swiftly towards the cross.

I wish you a blessed Mother's Day and courage to seize the opportunities that may present themselves to you. Amen