

Coop's Scoops # 175: Lent Four/ Mothering Sunday, March 14, 2021



Sentence: God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3: 16

Readings:

2 Chronicles 36: 14-23

Psalm 137: 1-6

Ephesians 2: 4-10

The Collect:

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world, evermore give us this bread, that He may live in us, and we in Him, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: John 3: 14-21 (see also vs 1-13, Jesus and Nicodemus)

⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.^[a]

¹⁶ "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.

¹⁷ "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹ But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.

SERMON:

This Sunday is a very special day. The reason is that we celebrate two things which are greatly intertwined...GRACE and Mothering. It is, after all, Mothering Sunday, and it is also the Fourth of Lent, when our readings shift our focus from self-examination to God-adoration because of GRACE. Grace has been defined as ‘unmerited favour’, which is a very theological way of saying that God shows favour toward us even though we don’t deserve it. We will begin by looking at “mothering”.

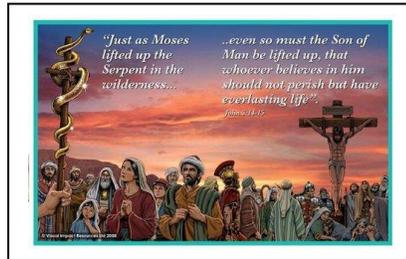
First of all, Mothering is an action and an attitude, and not necessarily a person. Both women and men can do mothering. Aunts and sisters and uncles and brothers can do mothering. Mothers and Grandmothers can do mothering. Our Lord Jesus Christ spoke of Himself as a “mother” when He stood over Jerusalem and wept, saying, “How I have longed to gather you as a mother hen gathers her chicks, but you would not have Me”. “Mothering” means trying (and **none** of us do this perfectly!!!) to be always loving, always believing the best, always hoping, always nurturing, always tending, always soothing, always teaching, always being there with open arms to receive a child who needs anything... needs food, water, hugs, or a response to joy, or fear, or love, or pain, or hunger, or insight, or fun, or anything else. Wherever a child finds “mothering”, he or she finds a safe haven.



I saw ‘unconditional love’, more clearly than ever, over 20 years ago when I visited my daughter and son-in-law and their new baby, my first granddaughter, Ashley. She was two weeks old. Red-faced and screaming one minute, a sleepy bowl-of-jello body the next. How they loved her! And yet, what did Ashley contribute? Well, nothing! Really, nothing! She didn’t thank them. She didn’t send them cards or flowers. She didn’t sing or get an A or blow them a kiss. She actually just wanted milk and fresh diapers at all hours of the night and day. But both of Ashley’s parents would happily have given their very lives for their new little baby, or for the 21 year old woman she just became. Why? Simply because she IS and she is THEIR’S. That is the grace of mothering...unconditional relational love. It is also a beautiful picture of the grace of God.

The Scriptures teach us that God loves us just the way Mike and Sandi love Ashley, only more so...because He loves every child ever born...including the children we once were...in just the same way. There is nothing we can do to make God love us more, and nothing we can do to make Him love us less. He loves. Because He is love. Because we are His creation. Because we are His. We are loved. Unconditionally. Forever.

In fact, God loves us so much that He sent His Son Jesus Christ so that we could have life with Him eternally. Remember the people of Israel in the desert. They cursed God and Moses too because they were dissatisfied with the food and the rigours of the desert crossing. And a plague of poisonous snakes caused pain and death. And when the people repented and called upon God, He made a way of escape for them. He had Moses built a brass serpent. Whoever was bitten and looked upon the brass staff lived.



That was in the time mostly fixed upon Law, when God sometimes taught His people through very dire consequences. We are also followers of the Law, but in a time focused upon GRACE. Just like the children of Israel, we were (are) dead and dying in our sin and God sent His Son to be lifted up on the Cross so that all who look upon Him and believe have eternal life. And God did this, not because He had to, or because we deserved it, but simply because He loves us, unconditionally. We have been saved through Grace..the **G**ift **R**edeeming **A**ll **C**hristians **E**verywhere. Because of Jesus, there is absolutely no condemnation whatsoever for any child of God. Thanks be to God.

In that case, should we feel free to live however we like? Knowing that there is forgiveness and love, does it matter whether or not we are obedient? Scripture says “Yes”; how we live does matter: obedience and servanthood are required. Perhaps we should look at “why”.

When a child is willfully disobedient...ah, the terrible twos and rebel tweens...then a parent may be exasperated, and not be too proud of the child, but the parent’s love for the child is not at risk. We will love our children through anything, even when it’s tough love. But oh how a parent’s heart swells with pride when a child shows character, when a child does what is right and proper and just, when a child excels in goodness. And how God’s heart can swell with pride and joy when we freely obey Him, and do what is just and proper and merciful and good for own souls and the souls of others. “Love” is not at risk. Maturity, goodness and pride are. We honour God not to win His love, but because of His love. We obey God not because we have to, but because we want to.

If we were gathered in Church this morning, I’d be giving out carnations to every Mother, and to every one who does “mothering” . In my time in Thunder Bay, we gave out carnations to everyone in the Church, as a sign of blessing from Mother Church, to which they all had come to worship. That’s how Mothering Sunday started out in

England... nothing to do with Mother's Day at all...but rather the one Sunday in the year that everyone could travel to the parish in which they had been baptized, to join hands and sing songs and circle dance outside to honour Mother Church and thank God for their Parish. They would then go on to their own mom's homes wherever possible and share a great sweet treat called simnel cake. So to all you "mothering" people out there....thank you, and to all of you , from your Mother Church, bless you! Amen.

Prayer: (today I've written this prayer in the first person....making it my own. If it resonates with you, pray it for yourself. If not, perhaps you could write and pray a prayer of your own about your relationship with "mothering" and with "Mother Church")

I am thankful, Lord God, for my mother, my friend. I am thankful for her tenderness and realistic encouragements. I am thankful that she let me see the child within her and the ways in which I could bless her life. I miss her. I am thankful that with her, I was always welcome.

I am thankful, Lord God, for my Church, my companion. I am thankful for honest friends who speak the truth to me, then love me into being "better". I am thankful for Priests and pastors, teachers, choir directors, bakers, poets, and "givers" who have led me into paths of righteousness by their examples. I am thankful, that the household of God has always felt like home to me.

I pray today for those who have not been so greatly blessed as I; for those who's relationships with mothers have not been life-giving; for those who's relationship with the Church has not been kind or safe. Pour out your love upon them and make us all willing to amend our lives, open our hearts and become a safe haven for all your children of every age. This I ask in Jesus name. Amen.

Blessing:

May you this day be content knowing that you are loved, treasured by God and precious in His sight. May you be relaxed and at peace knowing that our Lord knows your every need and promises daily bread, life and mercy. May you be grateful for all people and all things which have blessed your journey. May you find comfort knowing that someone is praying for you this very day! And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you always!

- Judie+