

22nd March, Mothering Sunday

Ephesians 5. 8 – 14

⁸ For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— ⁹ for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰ Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; ¹³ but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴ for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

‘Sleeper, awake!

Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.’

John 9

A Man Born Blind Receives Sight

⁹ As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ ³ Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We^[a] must work the works of him who sent me^[b] while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’ ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, ⁷ saying to him, ‘Go, wash in the pool of Siloam’ (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸ The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, ‘Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?’ ⁹ Some were saying, ‘It is he.’ Others were saying, ‘No, but it is someone like him.’ He kept saying, ‘I am the man.’ ¹⁰ But they kept asking him, ‘Then how were your eyes opened?’ ¹¹ He answered, ‘The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, “Go to Siloam and wash.” Then I went and washed and received my sight.’ ¹² They said to him, ‘Where is he?’ He said, ‘I do not know.’

The Pharisees Investigate the Healing

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, ‘He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.’ ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, ‘This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.’ But others said, ‘How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?’ And they were divided. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, ‘What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.’ He said, ‘He is a prophet.’

¹⁸The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' ²⁰His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.' ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus^[c] to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.'

²⁴So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, 'Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.' ²⁵He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' ²⁶They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' ²⁷He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?' ²⁸Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' ³⁰The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners, but

he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³²Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.' ³⁴They answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out.

Spiritual Blindness

³⁵Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' ³⁶He answered, 'And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.' ³⁷Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.' ³⁸He said, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshipped him. ³⁹Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.' ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?' ⁴¹Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see", your sin remains.

Happy Mothering Sunday to all mothers, and all people who join in that role of love and care, and there is so much of that about at the moment. Thank you to all the carers, whoever you are and whatever you do.

What is the role of a mother – a mother loves you – just as you are; encourages you, watches you fall over and helps you get up – feeds you, clothes you – and tells you off. Takes you to learn to swim, and sees that you stick to it – helps you with your homework, and is always delighted when you achieve anything at all. Now you know that if you had been here with me, I would have asked you for all of these ideas and so I hope you got them too, and that you have had experience of this sort of mother love from someone in your life.

Saint Paul was writing to the Ephesians, and he reminds them - ‘For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—⁹ for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.’ – and those words sound like they were written to help all of us to be good mothers, or show that mother love. A good mother will encourage you to lean away from the things that will harm and hurt you – and grow in the light, encouraging you in the good things.

So – what have you done to prepare yourself for a possible lock down – I have two projects in mind – playing my piano – something I so rarely do, and you all know I have been working hard with my British sign language, so I would love to get some hours in practising that skill and improving. Find a few positive things to do to help you grow in this extraordinary gift of time.

We have also worked hard to prepare and record this service to keep us all connected, we will be praying regularly, and hope to get that on the webpage too. Andys Lenten Bible study on the Beatitudes will be available online too, and we will be preparing daily prayers during Holy Week. All of this will build us up and keep us connected, like a good mother would too. I don’t know about your mum, but my mum used to tell us stories, my dad did too – and often we were told the Bible stories. She encouraged us to say our prayers, and I know they changed over the years, starting out as thank you prayers – thank you for my brother and sister, mum, dad and nan, and becoming more sophisticated as we learnt that sorry was important and that we could ask our father God for things too.

Maybe like me you took your mum for granted most of the time – and then there were various life events which made me realise what she meant to me – and how amazing she was. When I was about 16 years old she was knocked off her bike and fractured her skull – she was in hospital for months, and critical for what seemed like forever – then you realise that behind all the smooth running of your household was the mother fairy – washing, and cooking, shopping and ironing, and much, much, more, and although we

all helped, she enabled the wheels to turn smoothly. Have you said your prayers ran alongside have you cleaned your teeth – it was what we did – and she was not there.

I found this week quite stressful – we were waiting for decisions to be made and as I listened to the news I became more anxious about you all. We have a lovely and lively membership and congregation of many ages, some of whom fit into the 70 plus bracket that scientists are concerned about regarding the corona virus. I have felt much happier knowing that this group has been asked to stay at home – and although I know it is strange – I feel that everyone is doing their best to look after us all. I received a message from one of the deaf community on Whatsapp to say that someone on his street offered to give him a hand should he need it – he had not spoken to her before, but because of the virus she had spoken to him. In Ephesians Paul writes, ¹⁰ 'Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord.' It seems to me that loving our neighbour, doing what we can, waving is the new hug, are all part of a mother love that longs for us to grow, but also longs to keep us safe.

Over these next weeks we will learn to walk as children of light in a new way – join in – try to enjoy the new normal – and we will have such a lot to share when we get back together. Andy and I will endeavour to speak to as many of you as we can by phone over the weeks, and I know the pastoral team will be doing that as well. Phone each other, and then phone someone you don't normally and say hello. Live as children of light - for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.