

ALL AGE TALK FOR MOTHERING SUNDAY

Lent 4 Sunday 22nd March 2020 Mothering Sunday (All Age Worship)

Theme: Relationship/The Family of God.

Gospel John 19: 25b-27

Walking the Way of the Cross (Church House Publishing 2019) Twelfth Station:

Jesus on the Cross: his mother and his friend.

This is a talk I was going to give at the All Age Family Service on Mothering Sunday.

When you picture God in your mind, I wonder- what you see?

When I was a child, I had an image of God as a kind and friendly looking man sitting on a fluffy cloud floating around somewhere up in the sky.

During Lent we have so many opportunities, both with the Stations of the Cross and also our Bible readings, to create in our mind's images or pictures of God.

This morning, I'm going to talk about what image of God we might in our minds when we think about the 12th Station of the Cross where Jesus is crucified, alongside today's Bible reading which describes an interaction at the foot of the cross between Jesus, his mother Mary and his friend John. But first, let me tell you a story about a little boy who wanted to know what God looked like...

THE FACES OF GOD

There was once a little boy who wanted to meet God because he wanted to know what God looked like. He knew it was a long trip to where God lived, so he packed his rucksack with Smarties and cans of Coke, and he started on his journey.

When he had gone a short way, he met an old woman. She was sitting in the park, staring at some pigeons. The boy sat down next to her and opened his rucksack.

He was about to take a drink from one of his cans of Coke when he noticed that the old lady looked hungry, so he offered her some Smarties. She gracefully accepted them and smiled at him.

Her smile was so amazing that the boy wanted to see it again, so he offered her a can of Coke. Once again, she smiled at him. The boy was delighted. They sat there all afternoon eating and smiling, yet they never said a word.

As it grew dark, the boy realised how tired he was, and he got up to leave. Before he had gone more than a few steps, he turned around, ran back to the old woman and gave her a big hug. She gave him her biggest smile ever.

When the boy opened the door to his own home a short while later, his mother was surprised by the look of joy on his face. She asked him, "What did you do today that made you so happy?"

He replied, "I had lunch with God." But before his mother could respond, he added, "You know what? She's got the most beautiful smile I've ever seen!"

Meanwhile, the old woman, also radiant with joy, returned to her home. Her neighbour was stunned by the look of peace on her face, and she asked, "What did you do today that made you so happy?"

She replied, "I ate Smarties in the park with God." But before her neighbour responded she added, "You know, he's much younger than I expected."

Let's just remind ourselves of today's Gospel reading:

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.
John 19: 26-27

For me, this text, taking place at the foot of the Cross, paints a picture in my mind of a God who really cares, a God for whom RELATIONSHIP is so important.

We have here a dying son, a bewildered disciple and friend, and a mother whose heart is broken. Jesus is on the cross-he's being crucified. He must have been in so much pain, enduring so much suffering. Yet his concern isn't for himself-its for his mother Mary and for John, the disciple whom he loved. And I get such wonderful images from this scene of a God of COMPASSION and CARING. Even at the moment of his death, Jesus' heart is open to those who suffer. He knew what Mary was going through-her pain and her grief, and so he tenderly wanted to provide for her. By doing this, Jesus revealed his love for his family, and for us.

So, Jesus invites them to form a relationship. A new family is created in the shadow of the cross. As Phillip North says in *Walking The Way Of The Cross*, "*Here, through the shedding of his blood, he forms a new family of love, one that we call the church.*"

As human beings we are made for relationships. When we feel lonely or hurt who do we turn to? We find comfort in community, in family life where we can strengthen and support one another. We get a sense of being in it together and that is particularly evident at this time when we are facing the challenges and difficulties surrounding the coronavirus. As Bishop Stephen said in his letter this week "*One of the deep foundations of the Christian faith is that it is not good for humankind to be alone*".

Many of us have had to be separated from each other, no longer able to interact in the same way as we normally do. But even though we may be physically separated

from each other, our God, who shows in today's Gospel the importance of relationships, wants us, as his sons and daughters, to know his loving care and compassion towards us. And we are reflecting this loving relationship by caring now for each other in so many ways. For example, many people from our congregation have offered themselves to be someone who contacts other parishioners who are self-isolating for whatever reason. We are demonstrating that sense of community, that sense of belonging which comes through in the triangle of caring and compassion that we have between Jesus, Mary and John.

It's really appropriate that we have this reading today on Mothering Sunday when the pain of Jesus' crucifixion and the pain of motherhood are brought together. Today we have an opportunity to say thank you to those people in our lives who care for us, who show us compassion and kindness. That might be our Mothers, or it might also be people who are like Mothers to us.

Lent, Holy Week and Easter are going to be very different for us all this year. We are discovering a new way of being God's people with the reassuring knowledge that with God all things are possible. Perhaps we can think about the images of God that come into our minds at this time, as a way of bringing ourselves closer into the loving relationship with a God who died out of love for us and who will never abandon us.

Amen