

Sunday Sermon

Revd Canon Charles Jenkin – 14th March 2021 – Lent 4 – Mothering Sunday

Numbers 21.4-9; Psalm 127.1-4; Ephesians 2.1-10; John 19.25b-27

Rather like the killing of George Floyd by arresting police officers last summer in the USA, which sparked the Black Lives Matter movement, the murder of poor Sarah Everard in south London is sparking similar outrage. This time it is a specialist off-duty police officer, no less, who has been charged; and the spectacle of an officer specifically charged with protecting the community, is deeply betraying the trust that is put in them. This is the common feature here. And sadly that sense of betrayal has been given a twist by the clumsy confrontation on Clapham Common last night.

Fortunately, the abduction and murder of a young women from a British street is actually, thankfully, a pretty rare occurrence, though no less shocking for that. Indeed far more men die violently on the streets of Britain. But this is not the issue here. The real issue is about the appalling level of violence and abuse towards women and girls in our country, mostly behind closed doors, mostly by men, which has reached epidemic proportions. Of course men are sometimes violently abused by women too, but in far smaller numbers.

But even more than this, is the way that women and girls so often have to go in fear for their safety, often of pestering males, in all sorts of situations. This is like Black Lives Matter, which revealed simmering resentments about casual and unconscious racism and reduced opportunities experienced by many minority communities. There is a similar deep resentment about the way so many women are treated in British communities, in all sorts of ways.

There is an irony of course, in that in many ways our country has made more progress than most in building a multiracial society at ease with itself, with respect and opportunity for all. This country has also made more progress than most towards achieving real equality for women too. But all these events of the last year are showing us, that there is still a way to go, a real way to go. Perhaps though, the progress that has already been made towards racial equality and women's equality, does now give us the foundations we need to do more. And certainly much more needs to be done, and there is no room for complacency, and we cannot just blame it heightened emotions because of the pandemic.

The simmering anger needs of course to be expressed, and heard, that's the important bit, and heard, hopefully without too much destructive fallout. But what is needed is a new consensus across our communities, so that we can work together to overcome these deep seated issues. This cannot be a contest between different communities; there is no future in that. This cannot be a matter of political fodder; there is no future in that either. This cannot be a contest between the sexes. We must work together, to achieve justice and equality and safety for everyone's wellbeing, and this starts by listening well, and respectfully, to one another, and being ready to feel the pain of others without fear or favour.

ST MARY-LE-TOWER CHURCH IPSWICH

And in this context today, we celebrate Mothering Sunday. Mothering Sunday is not a day without pain in itself. The ideals of motherhood are, frankly, often not helpful, heaping burdens of guilt and loss on vulnerable women. This pain runs all the way from the pain of women who have for various reasons not been able have children, to the pain of lost love and estranged families and children; the list is really quite long. Motherhood has a cost, and not just for mothers, in many and various ways.

However the important thing we particularly celebrate on Mothering Sunday is the strength of love that can hold, and cover, and comfort those who are in pain. In the strong, comforting, costly love of Motherhood, we see a reflection of the strong, comforting, costly, healing love of God. This is the scene that is being played out at the cross in today's Gospel reading, with Jesus, Mary his mother, and John the beloved disciple who is a kind of every-disciple. As God in his great love is paying the cost of the world's sin, so Jesus comforts those closest to him by encouraging them to take loving care of one another. It is indeed all about love.

Mothers are of course not the only people who show such costly love, but they are probably the people who actually do so most consistently, and probably also consistently at the greatest personal cost. Such costly love doesn't have to be perfect; and is often quite messy. But it is a true example to us all, a window into the strong, costly, comforting, healing love of God, a vision of the heart of God. It is a love that indeed covers a multitude of sins. Amen.

CJ. 14.03.21