

A Message from Godfrey

Mothering Sunday

This is a day of celebration, a pause in the austerity of Lent to have a time of celebration and thanksgiving for mothers. Today we thank God for Mothers, for our nurturing, for our upbringing and the chances in life, which they have given for us, often sacrificially. It is also a day to learn from the example of their love.

We have had some bad examples of parenthood recently. In our own country and in other countries news stories have shown parents who have treated their children really badly. Yet these cases are all the more shocking because we know that the true nature of parenthood is one of care and compassion and protection.

Mothering Sunday is a wonderful day in which we celebrate the nurture of parents and of course especially our mothers. As Christians we believe that we are able to speak about what God is like because Jesus shows us God in human form. When we look at Jesus and his life we see the very best demonstration of the qualities which we need to be good parents.

One thing which we saw very clearly in the life of Jesus was that God loves his children. When Jesus lived in Palestine he opened himself up to all sorts of people and showed very open love. He welcomed thousands of people to the hillside and taught them and fed them all. He encouraged the outcasts and the bad people and he loved them all.

This is what we expect from human parents because we expect parents to love their children.

In "The Prodigal Son", the father was very forgiving but his older brother was very angry and upset.

It's interesting to wonder which character we would be if we were in this story. Could we be as generous and forgiving as the father who didn't just wait for his son to reach him he ran out to greet him, in a culture when fathers didn't run anywhere? Or would we have the courage to swallow our pride and come crawling back home after we had wasted everything as the younger son did? Perhaps we would be like the older brother – really angry at the seeming unfairness of welcoming back with a party this brother who had caused his father such heartache while he had stayed at home doing what his father asked of him.

But while we can see how this story is very much about how God forgives us, no matter how bad we are, we can also see how the older brother might have felt. Perhaps he was just like the Pharisees whining and complaining and so concerned with their own religious rules that they miss the grace of God and all that he offers. How fortunate was the returning son that he met the father first rather than the elder brother?

It perhaps raises a challenging question- at which end of the spectrum are our churches today in how they work and present themselves to the world- closer to the critical, judgmental son or the unconditional welcome of the father?

At an individual level I suspect many of us would identify with the prodigal son- he had to get to that point- rock bottom – before he reached the turning point when he really understood what he had done – he turned round and went back home. That is just what we mean by “repentance” - more than just feeling sorry, or remorseful –it is about changing direction and turning back to God and finding , like the father in the story that God is already on his way rushing out to meet us.

This story reminds us that no matter who we are and no matter what we have done, God loves us and really cares about us. Many people find that really hard to accept.

Mothering Sunday is a day when a lot of mothers receive presents or are given a treat. It is also a day when we should remember those mothers who are bringing up their children in poverty and violence; in a situation where there is no education or medical or political support.

In the story of the Prodigal Son, we hear all about the actions and the opinions of the father, the Prodigal and the angry older brother.

My question for us is this? On this Mothering Sunday, how do we think the Prodigal's mother would have re-acted to her husband and her sons?

Thoughts and prayers

Godfrey