

## Mothering Sunday Sermon – Posies & Pandemics –

### Ephesians 5:9-18 & John 9 – Rev Nathan Thorpe

Unfortunately, despite not being able to meet in person, we've decided to take to the air-waves and social media! So, there really is no getting away from us!

I jest, but that is actually the main point of my sermon this Sunday.

The phrase that has been rattling around my head since Monday – which feels like last year – is 'For a time such as this'.

It is challenging to do a new thing. It is hard to be separated from the things that mean so much to lift our spirits this week. For St Peter's, it might be the camaraderie and cadences of the choir. For Anne & I, it is sharing the Eucharist with all of you. It has been a challenge this week to adapt to so much and keep things as normal as possible amidst a confusing time.

In the midst of this, it is Mothering Sunday. Love it or loath it, our mothers – or those who have nurtured us - have made an impact on our lives. In our Gospel reading, the man who was blind was not fortunate – he was rejected by his parents when they should have been celebrating his new-found sight rather than being scared of the social and religious disapproval of the pharisees.

But, as I said, change is challenging – and no doubt it took some adapting to as well.

For many of us, this gospel story of worlds turned upside down will resonate. For some of our older members, who have lived through such times before, you may be thinking 'here we go again...'

But in a week of school closures, self-isolation, social distancing and more, several parishioners gave me a pot filled with the blooms I gave out as part of a sermon to grow peace this week.

That is not a hint to the rest of you to give them back to me – but you could think about passing them on if you haven't already done so!

On Mothering Sunday here in St Peter's, we give out plants. For some of you, these will be arriving on your doorstep, to be cared and nurtured – and as a reminder to the rest of you in this sermon that, quietly and gently, spring is springing.

The blooms I have been given, the Gospel story this week, and our Epistle have confirmed my attitude this week – that the present pandemic has the opportunity to strengthen our Christian witness to the love of God seen in Jesus - not because it was never there – but because it was where we least expected it!

I also think that in darker times we see that more clearly. Paul picks that up when he comments in the Epistle that *everything exposed by the light becomes visible-and everything that is illuminated becomes a light* (Ephesians 5:13).

There are two things that are important for good care. Often seen in mothers, but in anyone who cares, really.

Firstly – dedication. In the necessary and often, un-noticed – and often, unappreciated tasks to keep children growing & developing. It doesn't end when they're out of nappies and potty-trained.

The emphasis on devotion to our neighbours will suffice at present – and it is brilliant to see many initiatives started. Join in with them if you can!

Yet, kindness in a confused few weeks will suffice for now. Let us use it as training habits in ourselves to last much longer as our Epistle encourages (Ephesians 5:9)!

As we explore, learn and adapt to a new environment, we can reflect on the reasons why society was thrown into disarray – and our attitudes to those who are now in the public eye more than ever.

Secondly – understanding. Sometimes, as teenagers – this seems like interfering – but good carers seek to understand the people we have been and have become.

The best kind of understanding is an honest understanding. They would back you to the hilt, but also pull you up when you need it. They seek to understand us, as well as have us understood by others. I think this is what Jesus' life was about – so it's not a novel idea.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu once said 'There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in.'

He got it spot on. Though our public witness should seek to be as vibrant as the spring flowers appearing around us, we need to give serious thought to the seasons, the systems, values and factors that have caused the disruption we live in at the present time. To consider whether they are acceptable after this pandemic has passed; and if so, how we will address it.

Alongside the response of hands and hearts goes the response of our heads and conscience.

We go into a time of change, but it is one we have been preparing for. Although we aren't together this morning, we are each in a place to live as *children of light* (Ephesians 5:8).

As Easter approaches, we are reminded of the new life, new start that comes with the resurrection of Jesus – of how the old is transformed and begins something that no one could have foreseen.

Let us '*wake up, sleepers, and rise from the dead*' (Ephesians 5:14). Christ will still shine for us in a time such as this.

Part of *exposing the deeds of darkness* (Ephesians 5:11) begins simply – by picking up the phone or a pen (remember to wipe them first), sign a petition, grab a book, thinking and talking about the welfare of others who will be struggling more than ourselves in the months to come. Use our Sunday Club page with kids and grandkids, or look into local initiatives that will help renew those who have been most affected.

All of this, so that, when we do come back together – and our church is filled with song again - who knows what we may further do to lighten this world?

May these words have been to the glory of God, and the encouragement of his people. Amen.