

Dear friends,

Special thanks to Mark Perry who played the organ, filling in for Stephen Tanner, who is off with Covid. A double shame as it was Stephen's birthday on Sunday but we sang "Happy Birthday" and recorded it and Lucinda sent it to him! Thank you also to Katie Harding from the charity "Mary's meals" who gave an excellent presentation and garnered a lot of interest in their work. £15.90 apparently feeds a child for a year in places like Malawi which places my weekly food shop in some kind of perspective. We welcome Rob Holmes to speak to All Saints and St. Michael's churches on behalf of Mary's meals on Mothering Sunday.

Sunday 27th March – Mothering Sunday

This Sunday I will be presiding at All Saints and St. Michael's churches and Archdeacon Trevor Jones is presiding at St. Peter's.

Exodus 2: 1-10. A story of maternal instinct that transcends socio-political and ethnic boundaries that provides the basis of the story of Moses. That Moses is indeed an Egyptian name provides a kernel of truth to the story. It seeks to explain how the future deliverer of Israel grew up in the Egyptian court but also how God works using the emotions and determined sympathetic action of women that ignored the divisions of the day.

Colossians 3: 12-17. An uncomplicated list of virtues set within the framework of Christ being "all in all". The new values that will shape the new community are humility and forgiveness, but the absolute head of the moral pyramid is Love.

John 19: 25-27. Mary is not mentioned by name – simply "woman" and neither is "the disciple who Jesus loved" named. It is simply church tradition that identifies them as Mary and the John the apostle. This has led scholars to suggest the deeper meaning (beloved of the fourth gospel) that Jesus is creating a new community or new family called "church". A difficult one for mothering Sunday as Jesus does little to support "family values" championing as he does discipleship over family ties.

Thought for the Day

The war of attrition being waged against Mariupol - a template used by the Russians in Aleppo - betrays the complete lack of concern for human life that tends to be the hallmark of dictators everywhere. War is the great leveller and everyone within the city limits of that beleaguered city is suffering and facing exactly the same fate. The politician and petty criminal, the professor and postman, the prelate and drug addict are “all in this together” to coin the political slogan. In such circumstances, when it is so obvious that you have no control over what is happening to you, but you only have control over how you react. We glimpsed this in a very partial form during the height of the Covid crisis, and people have experienced this in localised forms in everything from prisons to concentration camps.

The values that dictate how we treat and deal with other people, even in the most extreme circumstances, are the measure of our humanity which is to my mind a direct reflection of our spiritual condition. By spiritual condition I don't mean whether someone is specifically overtly religious or not, but how one views your fellow human beings, as intrinsically worthy of life (the Christian view) or intrinsically disposable and exploitable (a utilitarian mechanistic view of life). Still the best book I have ever read in this area is Viktor Frankl's book “Man's search for meaning” which recounts his experiences and observations on mankind as an inmate of Nazi concentration camps. Viktor ends his book with these words “Our generation is realistic for we have come to know man as he really is. after all, man is that being that has invented the gas chambers of Auschwitz; however, he is also that being who has entered those gas chambers upright, with the Lord's prayer or the Shema Yisrael on his lips”

He knows man has amazing powers of endurance so long as it makes sense to him to go on living. He who has a why to live can bear with almost any how”

This Prayer was found written on a piece of wrapping paper near the body of a dead child in Ravensbruck where 92,000 woman and children died in 1942. It remains one of the most moving prayers I have ever read – victims praying for the forgiveness of their persecutors.

**O lord,
Remember not only the men and woman of goodwill,
But also those of ill will.
But do not only remember the suffering they have inflicted on us,**

**Remember the fruits we bought thanks to this suffering,
Our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, the courage, the generosity,
The greatness of heart which has grown out of all this.
And when they come to judgement
Let all the fruits that we have borne
Be their forgiveness. AMEN AMEN AMEN.**

Love and peace,
Martin