

Dear Friends in Christ,

This image was sent to me this morning by Jane Brown at Chilbolton. It is a beautiful Mothering Sunday arrangement she lovingly made for St Mary the Less in a previous year - and if you look closely in the background you will see the Mother's Union Cradle Call framed on the wall! How kind of Jane who wants us all, in our homes rather than in our mother church this Fourth Sunday of Lent, when we would usually be gathering to worship, to know the love of God with us.



This morning must have felt difficult for us all. Who could have imagined an empty church on Mothering Sunday? A colleague shared last week that a fellow priest, fed up with his parish for some reason (you'd never hear me express that sentiment in my Benefice!!) declared *'I think I'm giving up church for Lent.'* He is now ruefully reflecting that we have to be careful what we pray for.

***'Where two or three are gathered together in my name'*** (Matthew 18:20)

This morning I took a 10am BCP service of Holy Communion at St Stephen's, Sparsholt. Poignantly, the church was empty of worshippers but for one doughty Churchwarden, John Wesley, who kept a safe social distance: He on the church side of the Chancel Screen, me stationed at the Rector's Seat and Altar. The beautiful *'all-knowing'* liturgy of the service seemed to speak into the reality of our times: Our need to bow down faithfully before our Lord and Saviour in fear and thanksgiving, never as important as now. I know that many of you will have worshipped in your own homes this morning – either listening to Archbishop Justin Welby on the radio, or joining one of the many available live-streaming of services available around our country (links on our Benefice website and online). Like John and I found, I pray that you also found a deep peace in your worship which comes from our loving Christ showing that He is always with us, through both the joys and the trials of our life.

This morning's Gospel message speaks powerfully into our current predicament:

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved

standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. John 19.25-27

Even in that moment of His own death, Jesus shows us His compassion for His mother, Mary, and for John, the disciple who loved Him. With His eyes surely on the bigger picture of our Salvation, Jesus also focusses on the small details of our lives which mean so very much to us. Jesus made sure that Mary was blessed with a secure future by placing her in the centre of John's life. As a poor and ageing widow, she would have had a precarious future without this intervention, in which Jesus passes on to John the cultural obligation to care for His mother. John is also cared for, as he receives from Jesus the blessing of a loving mother to console him in the loss of his beloved friend. Just as Jesus asks John and Mary to reach out to each other in a reciprocal act of care, so we too are called to contribute to the loving actions of Christ.

Our communities are currently being transformed by the many small acts of kindness which people are showing to the vulnerable in our society as self-isolation precludes huge numbers in our cities, towns and villages from going about their usual patterns of living. There is something wonderful to behold, as individuals are suddenly flourishing in the joy of helping others – in many cases forging new friendships with neighbours they might have lived alongside for many years without ever having previously communicated beyond an embarrassed *'Hello'* as they put out the recycling!

**Tonight at 7pm**, all across the country, we have another important opportunity to join together as a community, **lighting a candle and placing it in the window of our homes**, so that the light of Christ can shine out into the souls of our troubled world.

May this new-found joyful spirit of friendship and compassion for others less fortunate than ourselves, born out of the adversity of Coronavirus, bring us a new and deep sense of peace which passes all understanding in the love and grace of our Lord and Saviour.

Jax

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**Collect Prayer for Mothering Sunday:**

God of compassion, whose Son Jesus Christ, the child of Mary, shared the life of a home in Nazareth, and on the cross drew the whole human family to himself: strengthen us in our daily living that in joy and in sorrow we may know the power of your presence to bind together and to heal; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

