



A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEKEND

24th March, 2023

"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!

Isaiah 49:15

Last Sunday was Mothering Sunday, a date in the Church's year which has been largely re-worked into 'Mothers' Day'. Some mums will have had breakfast in bed, delivered by sticky hands, tea spilled in the tray, burnt toast and marmite thick enough to make the eyes water... but brought with the love that makes all the difference!

Not at the Hub, I'm sure! -but that Sunday can be a pastoral disaster. (*"Children, take flowers round to all the mums! Oh, and there's some left for Miss so-and-so"*). I remember a single dad who did all the mothering, and I've known childless ladies stay away.

The origins of Mothering Sunday go back a long way. Celebrated in England on the 4th Sunday in Lent since the 16th century, it's not certain how it began. Possibly a 'Christianised' Roman festival, it became part of the Catholic calendar to honour the Virgin Mary and the 'mother church'. Years ago, young people in domestic service were given a day off to 'go a-mothering', visiting their mother church for a special service with their mothers and families. It was often the only day in the year servants were allowed off. The housekeeper would allow maids to bake a cake to take home. Flowers were traditional and young people would gather them on their way home through the meadows.

As Christians, how do we think of mothering -on *any* day? From Genesis 1:27 we see that both female and male are created in God's image; there is both maleness and femaleness in God. Although the personal pronoun 'He' is used throughout scripture and accepted to include all the character elements of God, it is an issue for some in current thinking. The recent Anglican Church General Synod debated the adoption of gender-neutral terms for God. The English language has no gender-neutral personal pronoun (we just have he/she/it) so textual changes to reflect this in scripture or song make for awkward grammar and syntax! But as was pointed out, "This is nothing new, Christians have recognized since ancient times that God is neither male nor female." Or perhaps we might better put it: He is both.

Going back to mothering, we celebrate the fact that as well as fatherhood in God there is motherhood, -perfect in the mothering of his children. In Isaiah God compares his own steadfast love with that of a mother (49:15). It's a powerful comparison: even the amazing self-giving love and compassion of a human mother is surpassed by God's. We are reminded of the very basic and essential necessity of mothering, whenever and by whoever it is done: female, male, mum, dad, grandparent, teacher, child-minder, youth leader, but supremely, by our Father (may we say 'Mother'?!). God. With God as prototype-parent we have much to be grateful for and to copy.

There is a verse in an old hymn that goes: *Praise to the Lord who doth prosper thy work and defend thee, Fitting the well for the tasks that are ever before thee, Then to thy need, he like a mother doth speed, Spreading the wings of grace o'er thee.*

Happy Mothering, on any day!... everyone!