

Lent 4 - Marks of a Christian - The Church - John 19. 25b-27

*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 her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.*

So what a reading for this Mothering Sunday - Jesus, on the cross - looks down and sees his mother. Poor Mary. She can't help him. Joseph died long ago, so there's no one to care for her. It should be Jesus's job - as the eldest child of the widow, he should be providing for her. And we know the 5th commandment of the 10 commandments - honour your mother and father - so Jesus knows it really should be his job. So he's going to do something for her, before he dies.

He asks John - one of his closest friends - one of the first disciples, one of the inner 3 who goes with him that step further than the others on all his adventures - the one who is sometimes called "the beloved disciple" - the one who was leaning on Jesus at the last supper. Who would be better to become like a son to Mary? So Jesus says - here - look after each other... Well actually its a bit deeper than that - he says - Mum, John is now your son. And John - this IS your mother.

In a way, Jesus's whole movement was all about creating new families.

Many of the people that followed him didn't really have a place in society, didn't really have families to care for or be looked after by - people like lepers, who were on the outside. People like women, especially those who weren't married and didn't want to marry. People like tax collectors, who were hated because they were on the side of the Romans. Jesus didn't surround himself with a team of A list celebrities who could make him seem cooler or give him popularity. The blind and the poor, the sick and those left behind - Jesus said - come to me and lets build a new kingdom. A new place where everyone has a place to belong. A new family. And he called that place - the church.

So what does that have to say to us on Mothering Sunday?

Simples...

What do mothers do? What do they give us?

Gives us life!

Feeds us and nurtures us!

Teaches us.

Helps us to grow up.

Nurtures us.

Gives us love and acceptance, confidence.

Mother kisses the grazed knees.

Well, these are all things that the Church does too -

It gives you life - when you're baptised into Christ - and receive his new life - its the church that does the baptism. You can't baptise yourself, or be baptised into an idea or decision - you are baptised into a church - a family, a group of people. you join a family, just like human birth.

The church feeds you with communion - the participation in the body of christ.

The church nurtures you and teaches you. - with sermons and bible studies and songs and worship

The church *should* give you unconditional love and acceptance - the security and confidence you need to explore and grow

And just like a Mother kisses the grazed knees, the church forgives us when we've fallen over, made mistakes, got tripped up - and the church gives us the healing of God.

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So I've been doing this series about what is a Christian? which was too hard to define. Christians just don't all look the same, talk the same, think the same!

But we do have marks - indicators, things that we hold in common - some are belief - like in One God, some are where we get look to for information - the bible, some are what we do - like prayer.

This week is really about where we belong - the church.

Jesus says - even if your biological family hasn't worked out, God's got a new family for you..

St. Augustine said in the 4th Century - who does not have the church as their mother does not have God as their Father. - You can't have Christianity without the church..

Not only does Jesus form a community, a family of sorts, with his disciples and the women and the followers, but after his death and resurrection - they carry on as a unit., Then when persecution comes, and they have to split up, and many leave Jerusalem - everywhere they go they didn't just make other individual disciples they founded communities - the church at Antioch, the church at Corinth, the churches in Galatia. There is no such thing as Christians independent of a community. Even hermits and solitary monks are part of communities.

Why is it essential for christians to be in the church, like a child with its mother?

Is it because its very hard to do this on your own - yes

Is it because we need each other to help interpret the bible and live it out - yes

Is it because we all have different gifts to bring, and all are needed - yes

Most profoundly, its because God is trinity - 3 persons in one family - so there's something about being separate but together that is at the heart of God.

That dynamic of love and service, of giving and receiving.

Its like one person on their own is too one dimensional, flat, to either experience or show what God is like.

We need the body of christ to experience something profound about our God.

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What we've seen during the pandemic is how much we need each other as a society and community, as a village - we are far more connected and interdependent than we ever realised.

And we've seen how much we love our families, and how important we are to each other. Which is great if you have one, but if you don't. - then the good news is that the church can be that family.

Today - lets celebrate families and mothers, the ones we have, the ones we miss, the ones God has given us. For no-one, in God's kingdom is without a mother or a child, a sibling or a friend. That's what the church is about.