

Lent IV Mothering Sunday – Laetare Sunday (Year A)

To say that we live in interesting times doesn't begin to describe the situation the whole world finds itself in at present. I found myself pondering that other phrase: *'It's amazing the difference a year can make.'* Substitute week, and I think back to last Sunday when, despite the rising alarm, we had over 100 of our intrepid and wonderful parishioners gathering to worship, as the people of Cuckfield have done Sunday by Sunday on this site for a thousand years. However, things are now changing by the day, and the pattern of life for each of us being completely rewritten. The important thing for all of us is to carry on worshipping at home, knowing that we are still intimately connected to God and with each other as members of the Body of Christ.

On this Mothering Sunday like no other, we have another Gospel reading from John. Over the past two Sundays we have firstly heard about Nicodemus the Pharisee who visits the Lord at night – as much a euphemism for his journey toward faith in Jesus as his actual turning up as darkness falls. Last week we were at the well with Jesus and the Samaritan woman, when he said those amazing life-giving words: *'Those who drink of the water that I will give will never be thirsty. The water that I give will become for them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.'*

The same imagery of darkness and water appear in today's Gospel – the beautiful account of the healing of the Man born blind. There is something completely authentic and human in the way Jesus spits on the ground and makes a paste of which he spreads on the man's eyes before telling him to wash in the Pool of Siloam. I think John wants us to connect the action of Jesus with strong echoes the creation of humanity in Genesis 2, when *'the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.'* (Genesis 2: 7)

After the blind man washes in Siloam's Pool, he receives the gift of sight for the first time in his life. Just imagine such a thing yourself. But even if this were not amazing enough, the wonder is that he also receives the gift of Faith in Jesus – the one who is the Light of the World. This is the main purpose of the account and reveals a sharp contrast with the Pharisees who are trying to catch Jesus out as a fraudster and blasphemer as the to-ings and fro-ings of this account unfold. It is they - the 'Spiritual Class' - who continue to live in darkness because they are so hidebound in keeping rigid rules and regulations that they have completely lost sight which the wonder of this healing reveals, Sabbath or no. They aren't allowing themselves to understand unfolding evidence of the Scriptures pointing towards the coming of the Messiah. This is why I love Nicodemus, who gradually 'feels' his way towards faith throughout the passage of the Gospel. His last recorded act is to anoint the body of Jesus after it is removed from the cross. I have no doubt that he, like the other disciples, goes on to know the fulness of the Resurrection Life of Jesus.

Like most of the Pharisees, sometimes we ourselves can be blind to the work of God within our lives. As people of Faith we are called to see the remarkable ways in which we are drawn on our journey. We are fed by God's Word, and by the Bread of Life – his Son. Yet all too often we forget the way in which he draws us to new sight - the call to view

everything by the Light of Christ. We can be quick to forget the blessings in our lives and just focus on the negatives.

The current situation gives us a chance to take time to ponder the wonder of God's Love. Perhaps for human society around the world there is the opportunity to explore what really matters in life – a reset button, if you like. And in the same way in which the blind man receives his sight, so too is there the chance for people to interact with others with the compassion Jesus shows. It is a chance to let the beauty of our Faith shine throughout the world through our healing touch.

One of the other names for Mothering Sunday is 'Laetare Sunday' – 'Rejoice Sunday' – after the Opening passage of Scripture to the Roman Catholic Mass for this day. It comes from the Prophet Isaiah, *'Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her (Isaiah 66:10-11)*. This call to rejoice on this mid-point of Lent, reminds us that at the heart of our Faith is the Easter mystery of the new life offered to all who seek to follow Jesus Christ. The passage goes on to say, *Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her 'that you may drink deeply with delight from her consoling breast. For thus says our God, 'You shall be nursed and carried on her arm. As a mother comforts her children, so I will comfort you.'*

The vivid nature of this passage, in the rather sanitized age in which we live, helps us to explore the richness of our absolute connectedness to the God of Love. This is a love which never fails if we too lift our eyes to the one who is the Light of the World – Jesus Christ.

**Loving God, as a mother feeds her children at the breast
you feed us in the sacrament with the food and drink of eternal life:
help us who have tasted your goodness to grow in grace
within the household of faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

A happy and Blessed Mothering Sunday my dear friends.

There follows something to cheer you which made me laugh!



I Samuel 16: 1-13

16 The Lord said to Samuel, 'How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.' ² Samuel said, 'How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.' And the Lord said, 'Take a heifer with you, and say, "I have come to sacrifice to the Lord."' ³ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you.' ⁴ Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, 'Do you come peaceably?' ⁵ He said, 'Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.' And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶ When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, 'Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord.'^[a]

⁷ But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.' ⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, 'Neither has the Lord chosen this one.' ⁹ Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, 'Neither has the Lord chosen this one.' ¹⁰ Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, 'The Lord has not chosen any of these.' ¹¹ Samuel said to Jesse, 'Are all your sons here?' And he said, 'There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.' And Samuel said to Jesse, 'Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.' ¹² He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, 'Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.' ¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

Ephesians 5: 8-14

⁸ For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— ⁹ for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰ Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord.

¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; ¹³ but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴ for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

‘Sleeper, awake!

Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.’

John 9

⁹ As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ ³ Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’ ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, ⁷ saying to him, ‘Go, wash in the pool of Siloam’ (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸ The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, ‘Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?’ ⁹ Some were saying, ‘It is he.’ Others were saying, ‘No, but it is someone like him.’ He kept saying, ‘I am the man.’ ¹⁰ But they kept asking him, ‘Then how were your eyes opened?’ ¹¹ He answered, ‘The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, “Go to Siloam and wash.” Then I went and washed and received my sight.’ ¹² They said to him, ‘Where is he?’ He said, ‘I do not know.’

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, ‘He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.’ ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, ‘This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.’ But others said, ‘How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?’ And they were divided. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, ‘What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.’ He said, ‘He is a prophet.’

¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, ‘Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?’ ²⁰ His parents answered, ‘We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.’ ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus^[c] to be the Messiah^[d] would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ Therefore his parents said, ‘He is of age; ask him.’

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, ‘Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.’ ²⁵ He answered, ‘I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.’ ²⁶ They said to him, ‘What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?’ ²⁷ He answered them, ‘I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?’ ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, ‘You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.’ ³⁰ The man answered, ‘Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.’ ³⁴ They answered him, ‘You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?’ And they drove him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ ³⁶ He answered, ‘And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.’ ³⁷ Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.’ ³⁸ He said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshipped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, ‘I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.’ ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, ‘Surely we are not blind, are we?’ ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, “We see”, your sin remains.’