**Family Service Talk 19th March 2023 – Mothering Sunday**

**Colossians 3:12-17**

***12 Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.***

***15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.***

Here we are again in the middle of Lent celebrating Mothering Sunday – how fast the years fly by! We have flowers, simnel cake, chocolates and cards …… and maybe some are looking forward to visits to or from family. It is a day when historically Christians went back to the church where they had been baptised and celebrated that moment with family. It was also a day of respite from the fasting of Lent and has become, over the ages, an opportunity to visit family and celebrate with mothers, giving thanks for their role in our lives.

For some, the memories of our mothers are very negative and unpleasant and we pray for you today if that is your experience. But for all of us, there will have been someone who became a mother figure in our lives. Someone who cared for us and loved us.

So, as we give thanks for our mothers, what is it exactly that we are thankful for? What, practically, do our mothers do for us? *(Care; wash; taxi; nurse; cook; clean; earn; d.i.y)* It is a hard question to answer in 2023 without risking becoming politically incorrect so let’s focus on the characteristics of a mother or mother-figure instead. *(Caring; compassionate; forgiving; kind; patient; loving)*

Please write on the card in front of you one characteristic that is part of what being a mother is all about. Then please come and stick it onto the board at the front ……. And so we have a description of what being a mother looks like. A lovely picture!

Let us now go back to our reading …. It was part of a letter written by Paul to the church in Colosse. In it he gives thanks that the people in the church know that it is through faith in Jesus Christ, his death on the cross and resurrection that they can live in forgiveness and peace with God. Paul goes on to remind them that faith in Jesus is the **only** thing that is necessary – **nothing** else is needed! (This was to put right some wrong teaching that had been heard in Colosse).

However, as a result of their restored relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, Paul goes on to remind them that they must therefore live in a certain way. It must be a way that reflects their belief in Jesus and their desire to become more and more like Him. Their lives must focus on Jesus Christ seated at God’s right hand in all that they say or do.

Thankfully, Paul knew that he would need to spell out clearly to the Colossians what that meant for how they should and shouldn’t behave. In the verses preceding our reading he details many things in which they shouldn’t now indulge and then in the wonderful passage we heard earlier he details how they should now behave. How helpful is that for the Colossians?!

And remember, this letter is speaking to us as Christians here at Stowe in 2023 just as much as the Colossian Christians in 60 AD. Paul makes that clear in the first verse we heard, “… as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved”. What wonderful words! And yes, that means us too! God has chosen us, by His Spirit, to have faith in Jesus’ saving work on the cross. And as we know ourselves chosen, we know ourselves dearly loved by God and, by His grace, being made more and more holy like Jesus every day.

And what should this look like? ….. We must be compassionate … kind … humble … gentle. *(Put cards on 2nd board)* We must be patient ~ putting up with each other’s irritating habits ~ forgiving others when they do us wrong. Over all this we must love others because it is love that draws the people of God together, unifying them in one faith. And on top of all this, Paul calls us to let Christ’s peace rule in our lives, bringing that peace to those around us and letting all that we say or do reflect God’s word. As we do all this in Jesus’ name, so it will make us overflow with thanks for all that God gives us and does for us.

It sounds wonderful doesn’t it!? How amazing it would be to live up to those expectations every day. But actually, on many days it feels really hard to do. Even before getting out of bed, we may feel we have failed – I know I do sometimes. But, as we are reminded in the book of reflections for Lent, failure is all around us, (we are sinful humans) and we have to learn to live with it and learn from it. Jesus calls us to take up our cross and follow him – he said it would be hard. But on this difficult path we are offered life in all its fullness and an outcome too wonderful to comprehend – eternity in God’s presence!

So when we feel overwhelmed by this list of characteristics that feels impossible to even start on, we must have hope ….

~ when forgiving someone feels impossible, we must remember how many times God has and will forgive us

~ when loving someone is the last thing we want to do, we must remember that Jesus commanded us to …. Love each other as He has loved us. *(John 15:12) ….* love our neighbour as ourselves. *(Matthew 22:39)*

~ when the last thing we feel is peaceful towards someone, we must remember that the peace of Christ will enable us to live in unity / harmony / love with other Christians even when we don’t necessarily agree with them.

~ when all seems lost, we must remember that we are trying to live this way in order to bring glory and honour to God … this will spur us on to Godly living!

~ and finally, many of the attributes of a follower of Jesus are gifts of the Spirit …. love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. All freely given by God’s Spirit as we keep trusting in Jesus. It is not all left down to us …. What a relief!

We are, as Christians, all called to live like this and, by God’s grace and the work of his Spirit, it is possible to do at least in part.

Finally … as you can see from our two boards, there is definite overlap between the attributes we see and give thanks for in mothers and the way we are all called to live as followers of Christ. So let us all (mothers, fathers, sons, daughters) this week commit to following Jesus more closely so that, by God’s grace and through his Spirit, the truth and message of the gospel will shine out in all that we do or say. Amen.