

John 3:14-21, Ephesians 2:1-10, Mothering Sunday

Mothering Sunday is for many an opportunity to remember mothers and to give thanks for them. For us all we can remember the **love of God** for us, summed up in the most famous verse in the Bible, in today's gospel reading, **John 3:16**.

'For God so loved the world', God's love is an **overwhelming love**, as it is God's nature to love (*'God is love'*, says John (1 John 4:8)), a love for all of creation.

This has inspired many through the ages: eg children's songs, *'Jesus love is very wonderful'*, *'Jesus loves me this I know'*; great hymns, *'Love Divine'*, *'O perfect love'*, and George Herbert's great poem, a favourite of mine, *'Love bade me welcome'*:

Love bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back, Guilty of dust and sin.

*But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning If I lack'd anything.*

'A guest,' I answer'd, 'worthy to be here:' Love said, 'You shall be he.'

'I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear, I cannot look on Thee.'

Love took my hand and smiling did reply, 'Who made the eyes but I?'

'Truth, Lord; but I have marr'd them: let my shame Go where it doth deserve.'

'And know you not,' says Love, 'Who bore the blame?' 'My dear, then I will serve.'

'You must sit down,' says Love, 'and taste my meat.' So I did sit and eat.

God's love seems for many to be hard to accept, perhaps because of our flawed experience of human love, or because of the difficult circumstances of our lives. The amazing truth is that God really does love us, Jesus shows this, coming to be with us, and is still with us. God created us in love that we might live in a relationship of love with him. We are all called to reflect this by our love of God and neighbour. We are created to love.

'that he gave his only Son', God's love is a **self-giving love**. God gave that which was part of himself. We are all called to sacrificial love, in denying ourselves, taking up our cross and following Christ. This calling will mean different choices for each of us.

For Jesus it meant giving his life on the cross for us, for our salvation. As in George Herbert's poem, it is often our sin that makes us slow to believe that God loves us, (*yet my soul drew back, Guilty of dust and sin*) for we know we are far from perfect, far from deserving such love. God sent his Son to deal with our guilt and failure.

'so that everyone', God's love is **undeserved and for all**. None of us deserve it, no one is worthy. As our epistle reminds us, *'For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works'*. (Ephesians 2:8-9).

So, we cannot use *'I'm not good enough'* as an excuse to ignore or refuse God's love.

We are all invited to receive and reflect God's love by loving others who don't deserve it.

Otherwise, there would be no love in the world at all!

'who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.'

How do we experience God's love? We *'believe in him'*, we seek to trust in Jesus and not in ourselves, to live each day in God's presence. Giving attention to others and the world around us can reveal God's love, and remind us of it. This quality of life is eternal, it transcends even death. *'Love never ends'*, as Paul says (1 Corinthians 13:8).

v17 'God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.'

God's love is a **forgiving** love. Forgiveness can be the hardest thing in the world, and it is only love that enables us to forgive. It is those closest to us, those in our families, or Christian family, who can hurt us most easily, and it is God's love in forgiving us that can enable us to forgive others.

John 3:16 has been called the **Greatest verse in the Bible**:

Greatest Love: There is no greater. **Greatest Scope** of love, for everyone.

Greatest Cost of love, his only Son. **Greatest Deliverance** of love, from death itself.

Greatest Gift of love, eternal life.

Let us not neglect this greatest gift, but enjoy it every day, trusting in God, and loving others as ourselves.