

Sermon by Diana Johnson

1 Samuel 16: 1-13, Ephesians 5.8-14 and John 9: 1-41

Trumpington Church

22nd March 2020

Mothering Sunday All-Age Morning Service 10am

PART ONE – with children around Simnel Cake

Mothering Sunday is the fourth Sunday of Lent. Although it's often called Mothers' Day it has different – Church - origins and is much older than the American festival of that name. Traditionally, it was a day when children, mainly daughters, who had gone to work as domestic servants were given a day off to visit their mother and family. Today it is a day when children give presents, flowers, and home-made cards to their mothers.

Let's look at the history of Mothering Sunday.

Today, most Sundays in the year, churchgoers in England worship at their **nearest** parish or 'daughter church'.

Centuries ago it was considered important for people to return to their home or '**mother**' church once a year. So each year in the middle of Lent, everyone would visit their 'mother' church - the main church or cathedral of the area.

Inevitably the return to the 'mother' church became an occasion for family reunions when children who were working away returned home. (It was quite common in those days for children to leave home for work once they were ten years old.)

And most historians think that it was the return to the 'Mother' church which led to the tradition of children, particularly those working as domestic servants, or as apprentices, being given the day off to visit their mother and family.

As they walked along the country lanes, children would pick wild flowers or violets to take to church or give to their mother as a small gift. [Show the bunches of flowers]

People ate traditional foods on this Mothering Sunday, too, and so Mothering Sunday was also known as Refreshment Sunday because the fasting rules for Lent were relaxed that day. So, grownups, remember that tonight when you want to eat chocolate or similar that you might have given up for Lent – **you can**.

Simnel cake

The food item specially associated with Mothering Sunday is the Simnel cake.

A Simnel cake is a fruit cake with two layers of almond paste, one on top and one in the middle. Remind children that almonds are nuts.



The cake is made with 11 balls of marzipan icing on top representing the 11 disciples. (Judas is not included.) Traditionally, sugar violets would also be added. So, why is it called Simnel?



If you like tall tales, they don't come much taller than this 1810 story from Wiltshire. Long ago there lived an honest old couple, boasting the names of Simon and Nelly, who, one Easter, found their household with a surplus piece of dough. They argued and fought over what to do with it – Simon wanted to boil it, and Nelly to bake it. In the end, they compromised and did both so that their invention became known as the cake of Simon and Nelly ... Sim-Nel, or Simnel!

The name Simnel more probably comes from the Latin word *simila* which means a fine wheat flour usually used for baking a cake. It's the same word that gives us 'semolina'.

Our Simnel cakes today will be taken to the coffee place and we'll all have the chance to have a slice – let the mothers go first, though! There will be a nut-free alternative, too [ask children to take them through before returning to their places]

PART TWO – from lectern; lectionary reading was the story of Jesus healing the man born blind

Jesus found spit rather useful.

I expect that some of you are a bit surprised by this start to a talk in church! In fact, though, spit played a crucial part in one of Jesus' healing miracles. We read how Jesus placed his hands again on the man's eyes. When he removed them, the man's sight was fully restored. 'I can see clearly now,' the man responded.

This is March 2020.

Do you know what 20/20 vision is? It denotes vision of normal sharpness. If you have 20/20 vision, it means that you can see everything clearly on an eye chart when you are standing 20 feet away. (In the UK, it's more often referred to in metric terms as 6/6.) If you have 15/20 vision, it means that you need to be closer to the eye chart to see it clearly, so you might need glasses. Some people have 20/15 vision, which means that they can see clearly from a greater distance.

The man in the story initially had 0/0 vision. It was only when Jesus had finished that everything became clear and he achieved 20/20 vision.

Time for reflection

Jesus talked a lot about seeing clearly. As he preached his message about God's revolutionary love, peace and freedom, he would ask his audience, 'Don't you see? Don't you hear? Don't you understand?' What Jesus longed for was for people to see the options that lay before them, assess them carefully, apply them to themselves and then act on them. He was concerned that most people would simply glance, take a brief look and then move on because it required too much effort or was too challenging to follow things through.



Often, we follow the crowd. Sometimes, this can make us sad and miserable. Sometimes, we need to uncover our eyes and step out to try new things and enjoy new experiences. This may mean making new friends or taking a slightly scary step towards something we've never experienced before.

One of the reasons that so many people followed Jesus when he was on Earth is that he showed them how life could be changed for the better. He did this by saying the things he said and doing the things he did, healing bodies, minds and attitudes. Many stories from the life of Jesus illustrate this point, but the story of the healing of the man born blind shows Jesus also standing up against unhelpful, man-made laws in order to achieve a greater good.

Time for reflection

Let's think about the way in which we approach our lives.

Prayer

Let us pray for the insight to be ready to change,
For 20/20 vision to see what change is needed,
For the courage to change what can be changed,
For the grace to accept what cannot be changed,
And for the wisdom to know the difference.

Amen.

Short version for 8am Communion

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Service Notes:

Sunday 22 March 2020

Alternative 1 of 2

4th Sunday of Lent

Reading Notes: Mothering Sunday may be celebrated in preference to the provision for the Fourth Sunday of Lent.

Collect

Merciful Lord,

absolve your people from their offences,

that through your bountiful goodness

we may all be delivered from the chains of those sins

which by our frailty we have committed;

grant this, heavenly Father,

for Jesus Christ's sake, our blessed Lord and Saviour,

who is alive and reigns with you,

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever.

or

Merciful Lord,

you know our struggle to serve you:

when sin spoils our lives

and overshadows our hearts,

come to our aid

and turn us back to you again;

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Readings

1 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.’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.

This is the word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Psalm 23

- 1 The Lord is my shepherd; •
therefore can I lack nothing.
- 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures •
and leads me beside still waters.
- 3 He shall refresh my soul •
and guide me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.
- 4 Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; •
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
- 5 You spread a table before me
in the presence of those who trouble me; •
you have anointed my head with oil
and my cup shall be full.
- 6 Surely goodness and loving mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life, •
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

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.'

This is the word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Gospel Reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

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 to be the Messiah 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.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, O Christ.

Post Communion

Lord God,

whose blessed Son our Saviour

gave his back to the smiters

and did not hide his face from shame:

give us grace to endure the sufferings of this present time

with sure confidence in the glory that shall be revealed;

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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