

**Sermon for 14<sup>th</sup> March 2010**  
**Being A Vibrant Christian Community**  
**Mothering Sunday Lent 4 (2 Corinthians 1:3-7 and Luke 2:33-35)**

Today is a challenging day for many people; perhaps because our own mothers have died, or we had a difficult relationship with our mothers or children, or for some because they long to be a mother but cannot be. The Mother's Day of the marketeers and card shops is a hard day for many. But the Church's Mothering Sunday can be much more affirming because it gives us a wider focus of people who have mothered us, whoever they are.

There's a lot more about fathers than mothers in the bible, largely because the culture of the time placed little value on women. There are a few stories of mothers, Eve, Rebekah, Jochebed (Moses' mother) and Hannah, and, of course, Jesus' mother, Mary. Although we usually call God Our Father, as Jesus taught us, God has many of the qualities we associate with mothering and there is a great deal in the bible about God's loving care for his people. The bible speaks of God as a mother too: Isa 66:13 God says 'as a mother comforts her child, I will comfort you'. In Luke 13:34, Jesus compares himself to a mother hen - 'O Jerusalem ... how often have I longed to gather your children as a hen gathers her chicks.' (also Isa 49:15 and Ps 131).

The love that comes from mothers, fathers and others, is a reflection of God's love for us. 'We love', John tells us in his letter, 'because He first loved us' (1Jn 4:19). The qualities of that loving care with which God mothers us are set out in our reading from Colossians. These are the qualities the Christian community is called reflect: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience, forgiveness, love, peacefulness and thankfulness. As God's chosen ones, says Paul, this is how you are to be. For us, this is how we are to live our faith in Burghfield.

We're looking at the fourth strand of our purpose today - Living Faith in Burghfield through being a vibrant Christian community.

We'll all have our own ideas about what being vibrant looks like, especially in the church. And most of us probably don't feel very vibrant this morning. But we'd probably all agree that being vibrant is about being alive. Bishop John describes vibrancy as 'being a community of grace which exhibits the character of Jesus.' We're back to our reading from Colossians and reflecting God's compassionate, forgiving, loving, humble mothering of God's people. Because when we are exhibiting these qualities, it doesn't matter how we sing or what we wear, we will be alive with the love of God, and we'll have to install a new queueing system outside the door because people will be queueing up to join us.

So why aren't they queueing up now? Because we're not there yet. But we are being transformed by our compassionate God, who loves us too much to let us stay as we are. We've got an idea of who we should be and we're trying hard to be that kind of community. It's a bit like celebrating the more limited Mother's Day of the marketeers instead of fullness of the Mothering Sunday of

the Church. We're not thinking with the mind of God, so we haven't yet got it right. To put it in St Paul's words: now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully (1 Cor 13:12).

We're on the road to being the vibrant, mothering community that we were created by God to be. The way the PCC has discerned this church will move towards being more vibrant is by creating a sense of community; being financially viable; and communicating well with our community.

We're going to be involved in more things like the May Fayre and Carol Singing and encouraging each other to be more actively involved with our neighbours because Jesus was intimately involved in people's lives and we're all called to care for each other too, whether that's by keeping an eye on our elderly neighbour or giving someone we don't know a cup of tea with a smile to the May Fayre. We're also going to get to know each other better and take better care of each other, through social events and building good relationships with each other, because the way we care for each other is a model for how much God loves the world - 'I have set you an example' said Jesus after he'd washed his disciples' feet 'that you should do as I have done for you' (Jn 13:15). We're focusing on being financially viable because Jesus spoke more about money and possessions than about anything else, and because, quite simply, this church will die if it continues to be unable to pay its way. And we're focusing on communicating with our community, so that they know who and where we are, and that God's people are alive and well in Burghfield, so that the world may believe (Jn 17:21).

We can't do any of that without having the life of God within us. We must embody the mothering qualities of God if we are to be a vibrant, gracious presence to each other. We must love each other and be patient with each other when we keep getting it wrong; we must show kindness and compassion and not be waiting to blame someone else; we must forgive each other, time and time again; be peaceful and thankful people. And above everything else, people who 'do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.'

When we can do all this, we'll be at the end of the road, the whole creation will have been transformed and this building will be bursting at the seams. But until then, it's up to you and me. By the grace of God, and with a little hard work, we can do this together. And what a difference it will make to our worship, our lives and our community.

Blessings,  
Gill