



**Mothering Sunday sermon by the Archbishop of Canterbury,
Justin Welby - Sunday 22 March 2020**

There are some places that speak to our hearts very powerfully. For me there are bits of London, where I was born and a section of the North Norfolk coast around a village called Blakeney. It has memories of my grandmother's house, of cold winters and a fire, of security, of summers messing about in mud and sand, or later on, in a boat. It has good memories.

Many of my friends in Africa, however long they have lived in the big city, talk about 'my village' in the same way.

Mothering Sunday is about place – about knowing where we are rooted, what gives us life, how we are related to others. It's a place for starting from and returning to, in ancient tradition we return to the church where we were baptised, where we grew in faith. The church that 'mothered us' spiritually.

Today many of us are disconnected from our roots, from our mother place. Lacking roots we now have to find ways to make a place of safety and welcome for other people at a difficult time. The temptation is to pull up the drawbridge and just look after ourselves. That's the kind of thing that leads to panic buying, to growing fear and to spiritual and emotional as well as physical isolation. It destroys us.

In our reading from St John's Gospel we heard how Jesus created the first Christian community even while he was hanging on the cross. Two people especially were left alone by his death, his mother and his closest friend. Through him they find a new place and a new hope. Even in the darkest moments Jesus Christ comes to us and makes a new place of nurture and hope for us. All we have to do is co-operate, listen to him, and as John did with Mary, do what he says.



How do we find consolation when fear and alarm, or struggle and suffering strike us? Many people would say through our parents, often through our mothers. For plenty of others that is not true. Parenting is not simple. The one who bore us may be one who fails us, even betrays us. Or the one who has died, who has left us. I suspect St Anselm, a long ago Archbishop of Canterbury, knew much about love from his mother. He likens God to a mother in his song, and speaks so tenderly of that relationship of love that he can only have learned it at home.

Jesus, he says, like a mother you gather your people to you; you are gentle with us as a mother with her children.

All love has its source in the immeasurable, wonderful love of God. All consolation comes from God, through being loved, and it comes to us abundantly, so that we can give it to others. Paul is breathtakingly honest at the beginning of the second letter to the Corinthians. He speaks of suffering and failure that almost destroyed him. Yet, somehow God consoled him in such a way that he could console others.

How did that happen? We don't know. Perhaps through friends. Perhaps in deep prayer. God gives me consolation in moments of desolation in all sorts of ways. The love of family. Silent contemplation in this chapel. The prayers of a friend or friends.

To consoled others we must find our own consolation in God. It's not a case of fake it until you make it. Its more seek until you find, come to God looking for the means to console the frightened, the panic struck, the panic buying, the fearful and all those around in whom alarm is rising.

In all of the current troubles, and, let's be straight, they really are serious troubles, looking inwards will only reveal the limits of our own resources, and lead to deeper fear and selfishness.



Acting in love found from God in Jesus Christ will do the exact reverse. As we look out from ourselves in love we can enable people to find the place of their nurture, not their historic place but a new place where they meet God and find his consolation. As we share our consolation the mother love of God will enfold them. As we love the poor, go and give to a food bank, call on someone who is isolated, do their shopping, pray with and for them from a distance, we will find that we are deeply consoled by our own gift of consolation.

Someone I know well, filled with understandable anxiety, posted a letter through every door in the street where she lives, inviting people to join her in caring for one another. The immediate result was wonderful. Strangers responded. Hope began. Of such small acts of love we make new communities as Jesus did with his mother and the beloved disciple. Of such small consolation we create hope in a time of sickness. And we find God and know our call, driving out fear, filled with faith. Amen.