

## Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> March 2023

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, we worship together in God.

Today is the fourth Sunday in Lent, a special day in the church calendar which has been celebrated since the earliest years of the church. Known as Mothering Sunday, it was the day when those who had moved away travelled back to their mother church, the place where their faith had been nurtured into life.

Commercialism has evolved this into what we now refer to as Mother's day and for many this is a difficult day, for a variety of reasons, but its essence remains the same. This is the day when we remember those people who have nurtured us and our faith, the people who have walked with us, challenged us, supported us, and encouraged us as we have journeyed. For some it will be a mother or father but for others it may be a grandparent, aunt, uncle or someone completing outside the family. Take a moment to bring to mind someone who has played this role for you.

As we remember and give thanks we can also commit ourselves to be that person for someone else and we can do this by taking the time to share, to listen and to encourage someone to move forward in their journey of life or faith. Perhaps encouraging them to go for a new job, encouraging confidence in a skill or gift, reading in church, or being a part of a worship group who together prepare worship.

We are all God's children and all on a journey, and we are here to help each other.

Readings        1 Samuel 16:1-13 ([Living Bible](#))  
                      Ephesians 5:8-14 ([CEV](#))  
                      Luke 19: 1-6 ([New Century Version](#))

### Reflection

Nearly always challenges result in growth. Samuel was challenged and Zacchaeus was challenged and in both instances their faith grew. In Paul's letter to the Romans he reflects on how adversity builds character. The world has had plenty of adversity and challenges over the past three years. It is just three years ago this weekend that the UK went into its first Lockdown, something few had ever experienced and it was the start of a long period of change, of evolution even as we found ways to live with Covid.

There was so much loss that it was hard to grasp the bigger picture and families are still coping with the loss experienced. However, change was occurring, and within the church the avenues we were forced to explore have opened up new possibilities for the future and resulted in a more honest view of the shape of church. Around the country imagination was sparked and growth accelerated, even though the challenges are still present. New challenges have emerged, and will continue to emerge, but we take hope from the knowledge that they will also lead to new growth.

For the people around Samuel the question was how do you get rid of a ruler gone wrong. Saul had been their first king and it had been a controversial move seeming to weaken the notion of God as Israel's true King. Saul had taken decisions which were not popular and which divided society, he had appointed a private army and funding it had led to him ignoring priestly advice. Samuel is charged with anointing the replacement, a dangerous thing to do when there is still a king in post, and Samuel knows this but a plan is made to distract from the true reason for his visit. The anointing of David as king makes sense to us as we are familiar with the role of David in subsequent stories, and in the genealogy of Jesus, but it must have been controversial – why would you anoint the youngest son of a farming family to be the next king? It is a reminder that we all have a role to play and sometimes we will be surprised by what we are asked to do.

I imagine Zacchaeus was surprised when Jesus asked him to come down the tree. Curiosity and his short stature had led him to climb the tree and he had not expected to be noticed but Jesus stops beneath the tree and calls him by name, surprise number one. The second is that Jesus invites himself to tea with Zacchaeus, which was a surprise to most of those watching as Zacchaeus was a prominent tax collector and we sense not entirely fair in his dealings. We are not told much about the conversation over tea only that it results in a change of heart, metanoia or repentance.

Margaret Silf, reflecting on this passage, says Zacchaeus climbed the tree to hoping for a sight of Jesus and comes down from the tree to discover insight into himself. She suggests this is a pattern we should recognise, our human thirst for knowledge, status and achievement can push us up the tree of ambition. Self-knowledge happens when we climb down by recognising our limitations, and become open to our true potential through the grace which flows from deep within.

When we fail to acknowledge our mistakes and blame others for what is wrong, we are denying our need to change and ultimately this will prevent our growth in Spirit. It is very easy to let impatience lead to poor decisions. It is even easier to let the media tempt us into a place where we openly judge others and display prejudice. We read stories everyday that are intended to incite prejudice. The people along the way of Jesus judged Zacchaeus but Jesus talked with him and through the conversation changed his way of life. I wonder what the crowd thought of that result, did it change their view of tax collectors?

Paul in his letter to the Ephesians talks about living in the light. It was a challenge then and it is still a challenge. Are we truly living in love, living in the light? There is a story about Corrie Ten Boom, who spent time in a concentration camp. It was an horrific experience and the horror did not end there because she had witnessed a nurse inflict unimaginable cruelty on her sister. In the course of her later travels as a speaker she came face to face with that same nurse. Can you imagine her feelings? She explains how hate flooded her being and yet she was a Christian and so with the hate came guilt at her inability to let go and forgive. She shared her feelings with a friend who suggested she invite the nurse to come back to the event the following evening. The nurse attended and Corrie was aware of her making eye contact throughout the speech. Afterwards she spoke to the nurse and explained her feelings but that she now recognised they had been replaced by love. It was a powerful moment and one which was to change both lives. The nurse through that conversation changed her life, metanoia, repentance through a shared conversation.

We are not perfect and we will be challenged, it is how we respond that changes us and has the potential to change the lives of those around us. Samuel could have ducked out of seeking David, Zacchaeus could have ignored Jesus, Corrie Ten Boom could have ignored her unease but they didn't and the story changed not just for them but for all of us. When we choose to follow the way of Jesus it is the greatest mystery tour for we can never be certain what is round the corner or what we might be asked to do. However, if we truly believe in God, the source of everything and the energy of Spirit which connects everything then we know we are never alone and no challenge is too great.

When we walk the way of love it is to be a catalyst for change, it is to inch the world towards the kingdom of justice and peace. Every day offers the potential for change, the opportunity to share conversation, and the chance to shine with love.