

Mothering Sunday, a break from the fasting of Lent, a chance for those in service to go home and visit their families and take a simnel cake, or is that for Easter? It varies. A day for flowers, cards, family meals. But also a day of sorrow, hurt, loss, feeling isolated, competition.

We talk of Mother Church, and a church family, in an ideal world of course both families and churches would be places of love, acceptance, safety and growth, full of give and take. Unfortunately both churches and families can be places of hurt, giving and receiving pain, causing despair, modelling behaviour inappropriate for the structure.

In the Old Testament God is already being given feminine, motherly qualities, we don't need modern day feminists to insist that God is female. In reality of course, we can have no concept that God has a gender, it is just a form of speech.

Becoming a parent is sometimes purely an act of nature, not a choice and until very recently we had to live with the consequences either way. But that special form of caring, nurture and teaching is different and can belong to either gender, any person.

It is a gift as well as a skill that can be developed, that can grow. Today I want us to focus on the many gifts that are required as we grow, nurture and encourage each other and those around us in our faith and love of God. Because this is much like bringing up a child, it is about loving, correcting, equipping, teaching, developing gifts and skills, exploring and growing and finding our place in the world, or even our places, as that can change from time to time.

In human terms we could be Mother, Father, Aunt, Godfather, sister, teacher etc, and the fortunate have a variety of people giving different nuances to the process of growth and its results.

All we have, all we are comes from God, and it is through the gift of his Holy Spirit that we can pray for his discernment, his will so that we can, in obedience, do what he has planned for us.

Sometimes it may be to lay something down in order to take up something new for him. Sometimes we need to live with the fact that a door we would like opened is shut and we need to open another entirely.

There are so many references throughout the Bible of God knowing us through and through, and, for me, the amazing fact that he loves us whilst knowing us so well. He knows us, he has plans for us, to be the best we can be, but even without that, even if we don't reach our best, he loves us.

Jesus, our brother, is our model, our guide. We were left with the Holy Spirit to help us. So what is our part in God's family? We are not clones and we have free will, but we know we are needed to complete God's plans, to complement others.

Paul of course famously uses the body parts as an analogy of difference yet being an essential part. I speak of it in terms of a jigsaw. Different shapes, different parts of a picture, fitting together, working together, each as important as the other to the whole.

Paul also lists roles we are called to, gifts we have, things we can contribute. Church leadership in the New Testament is team work because of the very nature of our commission. We have a kingdom to grow, we have hearts to win, we have the poor to care for, we have each other to nurture and teach, we have relationships to build. Our faith is about relationship, with God and with each other and with the world. It is a defining factor of who we are.

We need each other to help each other, to deepen those relationships. How is God calling you today to his kingdom work? What is he asking of you? What is it that he wants you or me

specifically to do? Remember, even a baby, who needs a lot of care, has a lot of learning to do, gives, contributes to the family life.

Age, infirmity, poverty, no excuses accepted. God has a role for you. It may be different from other times of your life, it may be a time to lay down some burdens, it may be a time to pick up a heavier load, it may be a time of change, remember the poem in Grapevine, but, it is time to answer his call, to play our part in establishing his kingdom here on earth.

Let's take some time now, call upon the Holy Spirit for discernment, wisdom and guidance and listen to God and ask him to use us for his purpose. We wait in obedience for his call. We trust him to equip us to do what is needed, to work for his glory.