

## **Reflection for Lent 4 — Mothering Sunday** by Rev'd Canon Michael Last

In his letters, St Paul provides us on several occasions with a list of spiritual gifts. Colossians 3:12 is one example, “As *God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.*” A wonderful list of characteristics we as Christians are called to live out in our daily lives. Let me for a moment focus on just one – patience. I wonder how much patience each of us has. If you are like me this second lockdown, with all its frustrations, has left my patience levels somewhat depleted.

Today is not only the 4th Sunday of Lent, but also Mothering Sunday.

One of the many characteristics needed in fulfilling a mothering role is patience. Without it frustration and discord are not far from the surface. It may take a young child some time to comprehend, and then apply what you are trying to teach it; and even when you think you have succeeded, there will still be those occasions when the child’s mind is on something else, they forget until it is too late what they have been taught. Such situations require the mother to be patient.

James in his letter says this about patience

*“Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.”*

One of the things that James in his letter is trying to address, is grumbling between members of the church. He wants to remind his readers to be patient and encouraging to each other, not judgmental. Placing his words as he does so into a wider context, that judgment is not in their hands; but rather in the hands of God, whom they are called to serve.

It is clear from early church writing that there was an expectation that the end and along with it, judgement, or as it is known in Greek the “parousia”, would happen soon. James is saying wait, be patient, live in the expectation, yes, but serving - not judging.

Patience in this context denotes self-restraint that enables the sufferer to refrain from hasty retaliation: not an easy thing to do if you are a church coming under fire from those around you.

An alternate way of looking at it is that, while there is time, there is also the possibility of change. That is what the gospel offers to all - that love which we seek to share.

The Old Testament alternative reading for Mothering Sunday is the culmination of one woman’s struggle to become a mother - the mother of the prophet Samuel.

Hannah lived in an age when for a wife not to have a child, she was considered to have failed her husband and she would often suffer tainting as a result. And that was true for Hannah. At her wits end, her patience gone, she goes into the tabernacle at Shiloh – the place of worship (*The story takes place before the temple was built in Jerusalem*), and offers to God her problem and emotions in prayer. She prays for a child.

In the fullness of time her prayer is answered, and she has a child. Yet in her moment of joy Hannah does not forget God and the part he has played, rather she returns to Shiloh, some years later and offers prayers of thanksgiving – she dedicates her son to God.

What does all this then have to say to us about the patience?

It reminds us that God’s timings are not always the same as ours. We may like things to happen yesterday, living in a world that so often loves instant results. But that is not, and should not be, what we as Christians should be focused on. Rather, we are called to be a faithful servant, called to share the love of God, regardless of what appears to be happening around us.

It is all too easy to write somebody off - they will never change, they will never ask the right questions. Yet so often it is a seed sown years before that just lies dormant until, in God’s time, it is watered and then begins to sprout into life.

For those who work hard and think they see no results that can be hard, but the call is to be patient.

Secondly, as we think about patience on Mothering Sunday we need to recall the image of the mother teaching a young child; being prepared time and again to go over things until it sinks in.

I recall in my early days working for BT being part of a team made up of very experienced workers who had been doing the job for years. They knew almost everything there was to know. But that experience, that knowledge, had dulled their sensitivity about how long it had taken them to struggle with the concepts and techniques that were now second nature. Their patience had gone. They expected to say something once and for it to stick immediately.

At times we can be a bit like that, especially with those exploring our faith. Those new to faith may need to look at issues time and again, struggling with them. We need to be patient with them while they do that, supporting and encouraging, building up, not knocking down. Constructive criticism is helpful, negative criticism or judgment can be destructive.

Patience is never easy it is far easier to judge and be critical. But so often all that does is hurt and destroy. We are called to building up one another and sharing God's love.

On this Mothering Sunday, let us reflect on the characteristic of patience and the way it is needed in so many aspects of life. Let us also pray, that patience may be a virtue, a gift from God that is part of our church's and our lives.