

survive it will die. If what it sees in you is a worker for its existence, then it's a temple of idolatry. If the church's aim is to teach children morality with fun, it should be no surprise when the children give up coming, for the world has much more fun to offer and a wider view of morality.

The church has only one thing to offer. Not herself but her Jesus. The church is the body of Christ and He is her head. That is He is the source of her being and the life of her existence. The joy of Mothering Sunday is not in the memories of a building or even meeting old remembered people again. The joy of Mothering Sunday is coming home to Jesus.

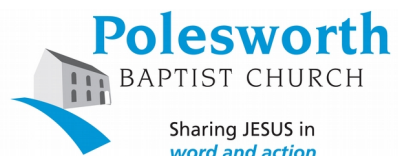
Perhaps your children have grown up, moved out of your home. You no longer have that close contact you used to have. Do they understand the joy in your heart when they come home to visit? When they maintain regular contact by social media? When you see what they are doing in the world? And when you see, even when things are tough for them, how they cope because of the love you poured out in them, the character you grew in them, the strength of your presence with them? As you love your children God loves you.

Perhaps as a mother you might wish that your children would let themselves love you more. That your love is not a smothering love but a freeing love, a love for life not control, a love for love, not duty. A love whose model is the love of God revealed in Christ Jesus.

As our love flows from God is it fanciful to say, that God would love you to let yourself love Him more? To let Him walk with you in your life, to let Him be the shoulder you cry on, the comforter you seek in days of trouble, the one who listens when you gripe and holds you tight when no one else has any care for you?

A mother carries a child within her body, but the born child grows apart from her with every day that passes, in its journey into being a man or a woman. But by the grace of Christ, and the love of God, when a man or a woman is born again, the Holy Spirit flows in that new child and with every day that child grows into being a man or woman of God, so the bond of the Spirit increases in them, and like yeast transforming flour, changes them into a true daughter or son of God.

This Mothering Sunday may we all re-discover the joy of the mothering church and happily nest a home in her being. Amen.



Mothering Sunday
14th March 2021
Reading: Matthew 13:31:35
Reflection [1]

Here are two picture images of the difference Jesus was going to make in the world. Jesus came to offer the blessings of knowing God His Father to all nations. From where He was then the outlook did not look bright. He knew He had enemies who were plotting to kill Him. He knew that despite all His amazing power, the power to still torrential storms, to turn a few fish and loaves of bread into a feast for thousands, to give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, life to the dead there was nothing He was going to do to stop His enemies

They thought, when he's dead, that will be the end of him. But now Jesus, perhaps even with a seed in His hand, perhaps remembering a mustard seed he had planted as a child in his family home in Nazareth tells us that the kingdom of heaven, that is the rule of God on earth, will not die with Him when He is killed. A seed in the hand is a promise of hope, a potential for fruit, a prospect of what can be. And when it is buried in the darkness of the soil the seed dies to itself and becomes a living plant. In speaking of the mustard seed Jesus is saying, my Father's kingdom may not look much now, but it will become extensive across the world.

The mustard seed in truth generates a bush but Jesus describes its fruit as a tree. He is using the ancient bible image for an empire, an empire so great that smaller nations find their blessing, their security in the safety of its being. The mustard seed that is planted outside the walls of Jerusalem on Good Friday will become a tree, a universal church, whose branches spread across the world. And people who did not then know God as their Father, like the birds perching in tree branches, will come and find their home with God, with His Father, with Himself. The tree has grown across the world. In some its branches are being cut off by persecution, yet these are but prunings which make the tree grow stronger and its blessings even more attractive to the birds who seek its shelter.

Then Jesus pictures yeast. And of a woman. She is first of all an image of the homely house mother, baking bread to feed her family. And to do that she adds yeast to her flour, for the yeast will work through the dough, silently and yet irresistibly to do its work.

It's an image of a woman of mighty arms and power for she mixed the yeast into a large amount of flour, so much that it could have made bread for a hundred hungry children. She's not so much feeding her household but her village.

It's an image, in the woman, of the Church and of the yeast as the invisible, transformative power of the Kingdom of God at work in the bread she is making. She actually takes leaven, not shop-bought packaged yeast. Leaven is yeasted dough that's been reserved for new flour. And silently the leaven transforms the flour, irresistibly the yeast does its work.

The Church in scripture is often pictured as a woman. We tend nowadays to refer to the Church as an it, but historically the Church is often referred to by her or she. The bride of Christ, the mother of the faithful, raising her children up into living like Jesus. The good news she mixes into our beings spreading into our hearts, mixing God's good news yeast into the lives of worldly children, to enable them to be daughters and sons of the bread of heaven. This is not an easy work, imagine mixing leaven into some 40 or 50 lbs of bread flour.

The work is not spreading a powdering of yeast over the flour but working it deep within its being, so that it becomes inwardly transformed. Sadly there is a long history of churches that settle for a sprinkling of yeast, raising up people who look like bread flour on the outside but whose inner beings have not been touched by the leaven of the bread of heaven.

There was a vicar in Cornwall in the 1800's, whose ways and life illustrates the difference. His name was William Haslem, and he worked very hard to raise a flock of proper churchmen. One day, one of them, his gardener, who was also in Haslem's eyes a good church child, an ally in standing against 'childish' faith, was taken seriously ill, and diagnosed to die. But, facing death his gardener found that being a good churchman did not comfort him in his hour of need. So he sent for a preacher of 'childish' faith to come and talk to him and pray with him. This preacher had been a drunkard, a blasphemer, and worse, yet he could say with David: "The Lord has brought me up out of a horrible pit of mire and clay, and has set my feet upon a rock and .. has put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto my God."

The preacher came to the gardener. But instead of offering comfort to the sick man, he did the reverse of what a normal priest would do and plainly showed the sick churchman that he was a lost sinner and needed to

come to Jesus, just as he was for salvation and pardon. The gardener was brought into deep conviction and found pardon and peace through the blood of Christ. When Haslem heard about this he was deeply angry. He eventually went to visit his disciple in order to reclaim him but the man would not be persuaded from the truth as it is in Jesus. Even saying to Haslem, "you dont know this joy and peace, I'm sure you dont or you would have told me about it. Pray the Lord may give it to you." Haslem fled from the house in a mix of disappointment and confusion.

But that's not the end of the event. On the following Sunday morning Haslem in great distress preached on the words: What think ye of Christ? And in the pulpit, while preaching, the Lord showed him that Christ is the true and only foundation, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, and Haslem was smitten with joy. His parishioners saw the change in him and cried out: "The parson is saved. The parson is saved. Hallelujah!" Some churchmen were horrified but most broke out singing: "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow". They sang it not once but like a might river flowing. Soon passers by came in. When the singing eventually stopped the cries of 20 people could be heard crying for mercy. People who then gave their lives to Jesus, finding peace, joy & blessing. Three of them were from his own household, and they all returned home praising God.

The yeast that saved the preacher, saved the gardener, saved the vicar, saved the 20 sinners in the congregation. The peace of life, and the joy of finding it is only to be found in Jesus.

Reflection [2]

God is a God of joy. The Church is a community of God's people, daughters and sons of God the Father, brothers and sisters of God the Son. Children therefore of joy. A mother raising children whose hearts are alive in Jesus, living in the happiness of the good news.

Perhaps you were once a child in the church, or even an adult. Perhaps you left the church behind, seeing it as a place of teaching, maybe fruited with some fun, but you grew out of it as you grew out of school; or fled it as a burden of duty, where the focus is all on keeping the church going.

And it that's you, let me say, you're right. You're right because churches do not exist to keep themselves going. If the main aim of a church is to