

First Sunday after Trinity

Prayers, Readings, Reflection.

“Welcome to another short act of worship for the Parish Church of St Martin. For those who are able to follow it as written or listen in, I hope it offers some comfort, encouragement and a sense of being together despite the distance between us.” Rev Jonny



*Be still, and draw yourself closer to the God who rests beside you,
before you and within you.*

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All **Amen.**

The Lord be with you

All **And also with you**

God the Father forgives us in Christ and heals us by the Holy Spirit.

Let us therefore put away all anger and bitterness,
all slander and malice,
and confess our sins to God our redeemer.

Father, you come to meet us when we return to you:
Lord, have mercy.

All **Lord, have mercy.**

Jesus, you died on the cross for our sins:
Christ, have mercy.

All **Christ, have mercy.**

Spirit, you give us life and peace:
Lord, have mercy.

All **Lord, have mercy.**

May the Father forgive *you* by the death of his Son and strengthen you to live in the power of the Spirit all *your* days.

All **Amen**

The Collect for the day

O God,
the strength of all those who put their trust in you,
mercifully accept our prayers
and, because through the weakness of our mortal nature
we can do no good thing without you,
grant us the help of your grace,
that in the keeping of your commandments
we may please you both in will and deed;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All **Amen.**

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Reading, Genesis 3: 8-15

Adam and Eve heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' He said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.' He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.' Then the Lord God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent tricked me, and I ate.' The Lord God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat

all the days of your life.
I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.'

This is the Word of the Lord.

All Thanks be to God

Gospel Reading, Mark 3: 20-35

and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

"Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"—for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

This is the Word of the Lord.

All Thanks be to God

Reflection

If the dust ever finally settles in the wake of this Pandemic, there will be a lot of reflection and soul-searching that needs to be done. We will see things differently, and the world will doubtless need to adapt and change in light of that new vision.

Healthcare, inequality, education, social care, consumerism, and much else will come under the spotlight as we work through the lessons learned from these incredible times. But also family. What we mean by family, and what family means to us will need to part of our thinking, too.

For many, it has been an intolerable time of separation from family. Planes, boats and trains all stopped, and suddenly we were cut-off from our distant family – in Jersey, especially, many felt this very acutely. Even if we could be near them, could we hug or kiss or even enter their house?

When once an extended family would likely all live in the same neighbourhood, or even the same house, now our families were internationally spread-out. Zoom and FaceTime were a help, but no replacement for the real thing.

The sudden inability to connect made the tragedy of family separation all the more acute. Then we had the added tragedy that numbers were restricted at such important life events – funerals especially, but also weddings and birthdays, too.

Everything that we had long been able to *do* as a family was cut away and the sadness and grief that that brought was immeasurable. That's an important question we need to ask ourselves in the years ahead – how do we relate as families when much that we took for granted is suddenly swept away?

I know for many the gift of prayer was something they turned to in such difficult times. When – in Advent – our prayer tree stood behind me, it was festooned with prayers for family and friends so long unseen, or no longer alive. Prayer is perhaps the purest way of holding family in mind, even when we cannot hold them in body.

The physical and digital interactions that had become so abundant in our daily lives up until this point, had to give way to a simpler form of communication. Holding before God those on hearts in the stillness and silence of prayer.

As we rush to buy the plane tickets and gather the family together again, let us not forget that the gift of prayer is always there, within a breath's reach, and can always be our comfort when we feel the pain of distance and loss.

However, our readings today – from Genesis and Mark's Gospel – invite us consider the other side of family life as well – one that has also been brought into sharp-focus in recent months. Family is not always what it's cracked up to be.

In the early days of the Creation Story, God walked and talked quite freely in the Garden of Eden with the first family he had created. There was familiarity and unity with God in the very beginning.

Likewise, in the Gospels, the Holy Family – Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus – are presented as a pure, unblemished picture of family solidarity and grace.

But in both accounts the 'perfect unity' cannot hold. Adam and Eve rebel, fall short, strike out and the bond of union is broken. Jesus is swept into a clamouring crowd and the family are left cut-off, grasping, and we could even say denounced. 'When his family heard this, they went out to restrain Jesus...they thought he was mad' and he said "who are my mother and my brother?".

This jars on the ear when we read it. How can God cast us out from the garden of union, and how can Jesus speak so callously of his own flesh and blood?

In the language of the 1970's and 80's, we might hear this called 'an attack on family values' – but is that really the case?

We have heard it more recently in the press obsession with Duke and duchess of Sussex – how dare they turn their back on their family? How dare they critique the idol of family unity? Ungrateful, entitled, they bellow. It's not for me to say.

But what I will say is this: Nowhere in the whole of scripture will you find a portrait of a happy nuclear family. Mom and Dad, 2.4 children, fidelity, unity, concord. Nowhere. Conservative Christian voices will make a lot of noise about 'protecting the family' and upholding 'family values', and there will be glossy photos of smiling families on their websites; but nowhere in the bible have I ever found a defence of this unrealistic ideal.

And I will also say this: I meet a lot of families. At baptisms, weddings, funerals and everywhere in-between – and I have yet to find a family that doesn't bear scars. There are black-sheep and broken vows as far as the eye can see. Every family has a story to tell, and more often than not it is a story tinged with pain.

And that's OK. It's OK. It's actually rather beautiful and reassuring! It's honest and it's messy and it's true.

Idolising the family as some 'perfect union' is what poses the most danger. Families grow and change and break and heal, and they can weather many storms. But the one thing they will never be able to endure is the artificial expectation that they ought to be 'perfect', or

that such as a thing as 'perfect' even exists. From that false expectation comes guilt, shame and nothing more than sorrow.

Scripture – Old and New, from the Garden of Eden to the villages of Galilee – tells a story that is echoed in reality. We are not perfect – and nor will we ever be. We are human-beings, doing the best we can in a confused and fallen world.

We do not look to God and say sorry for not being perfect. We look to God because God understands the messy reality of the humanity he created, and looks on us with love all the same. In Jesus God came to share in that messy reality of what passes for family life. He knows it and he loves it because he lived it. That's true for us, and it's true for our families, whatever shape and size and perilous state of disorder they may be in at this time.

Take heart, be kind, and remember. If this last year has taught us anything, it is to be grateful for the gifts of life and love, and to treasure what we have in prayer and forgiveness, trusting in a God who surpasses all understanding.

Amen

Prayers of Intercession

Pray for one another – those in our church community

Pray for the Parish, the Island and the World

Pray for the sick, the isolated, the anxious and depressed

Pray for the dying, and those who mourn

Pray for yourselves, and for your own needs

Lord in your mercy

All Hear our prayer

The Intercessions may end as follows

Merciful Father

All Accept these prayers

**for the sake of your son,
our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen**

The Peace

Peace to you from God our heavenly Father.
Peace from his Son Jesus Christ who is our peace.
Peace from the Holy Spirit, the life-giver.
The peace of the triune God be always with you

All **and also with you.**

Let us pray with confidence, as our Saviour taught us

All **Our Father**

**who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from
evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory
For ever and ever. Amen.**

The Blessing.

God the Holy Trinity make you strong in faith and love,
defend you on every side,
and guide you in truth and peace;
and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and
the Holy Spirit, be with you and remain with you always.

All **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All **In the name of Christ. Amen.**