

Head and Heart

10th March 2024 The Fourth Sunday in Lent Mothering

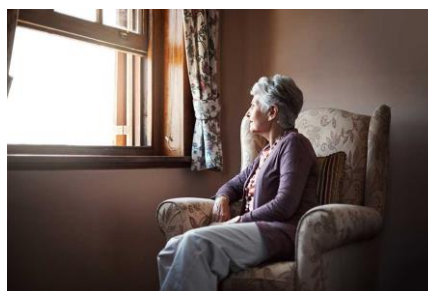
Readings

Numbers 21: 4 - 9

Psalm 107: 1 - 3, 17 - 22

Ephesians 2 : 1 - 10

John 3:14 - 21



Grace-full Mother

The scripture readings for today bring us to the heart of Lent, the Passion and Easter. The Gospel is encapsulated in two of the best know and well-loved texts. First the words from John (3.16) *God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son – Jesus – so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life – life in the Kingdom.* The other text is Paul's great claim (*Ephesians 2.8*) *It is by God's grace you have been saved - for a life of goodness – through faith).* Grace is a beautiful word describing the loving nature and purpose of God from the beginning – now – and for always!

'God's love for the world which is his creation' is the starting point for all we think and plan and do. As in our efforts to save the world materially from the threat of climate change and environmental destruction by our carelessness or greed. We and our world are all the object of his love – and at such a price!!

I love the world for all its beauty – most of which I have never been able to see more than a small fraction of it for myself. From sunrise to sunset there is beauty and goodness to be seen and discovered – the wonder of fruitfulness, birth, and rebirth; of loving caring, generous people, institutions, and communities. I find it hard however, to love a world in which there are over a hundred arenas of active armed warfare – a world of human greed alongside poverty, hunger and famine, but I do want to love the innocent victims who suffer needlessly. I love the world for all its often-hidden beauty in many trillions of kindnesses each day. They so often come from people like those I have met in various circumstances who may say, *'I have very little for myself or my family to eat but I'm happy to share what I have with you! People may have wronged me, even robbed me, but when I see them in need I'll not turn away.* That's grace! That's a clue as to how God loves.

This week is Mothering Sunday. Mothers, mostly, are especially good at grace. I recall one mother – full of grace. We sat together all afternoon in her little cottage kitchen. She told me again in detail of her joy in her

family and of her on-going sadness. Her only son, Geoffrey, had left home in his teens to take up a life at sea. Occasionally in the early years a note or a postcard would come from different world ports. Then they stopped. There was no further contact until mother used the Salvation Army's search scheme. Geoffrey had been in prison at the other side of the world. One brief letter came to say he was sorry and was not returning home. *'Shame keeps him away now, Dora explained for him. 'I love him. If he were to walk through the door now, I would welcome him home. He's, my child.'*

That's grace and Dora was full of it! I thought of the story Jesus told of another prodigal young man. What a pity the parable doesn't tell us about his mother! I believe God's grace was in the world from before the moment of his first creative word. Our Old Testament reading is another example of his grace. I can understand the refugees from Egypt. They reflect many instances from our life experience. Forty years of struggle to stay alive, always moving on, sometimes, like now, retracing their steps to avoid conflict with people like the Edomites. They became fed-up with God and Moses, his mouthpiece. They disregarded his guidance, provision, deliverance. When desperate for help they looked again to him. He was gracious, still loving and forgiving. No condemnation but new beginnings, new hope, new faith in him. That's divine grace!

So, to Paul's words. We have seen the grace of God in Jesus and in his Cross. Such love! Love for All. For those who have rejected him, disobeyed and disowned him, and yet turn back to him trusting in him through Jesus, there is restoration and new beginnings for life in his Spirit. The proof of such love is in the ultimate grace of the cross – he loves us that much!

One more story which this text brings to mind. Peter was a recognised *character* in our church and community. The day of his wife's funeral we waited while her coffin was positioned in the sanctuary, and I watched Peter stretch out his arm. He was pointing to the wooden cross now hanging above his beloved. For me, that scene brings together our Bible readings for today. That's God's grace!



A Prayer based on Psalm 107: 1 – 3, 17 - 22.

Lord, thank you for your grace, your constant, eternal,
never switched off love for every living creature – and me!
Your grace sees the best in the worst;
the joy rising through pain;
the rest beyond the weariness;
and will go on right to the far end of love
to give us reconciliation and peace with you.
Your sign is the empty, resurrection cross of Jesus.
Lord, give us deeper faith to know your grace in every part of life.

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