

## Sermon for the Fourth Sunday in Lent

Today is Mothering Sunday. Today we celebrate 'Mother Church', and give thanks for those places which have formed our faith. While 'Mother Church' has a specific connection to the Church in which we were baptised, as the place we were first formally welcomed into the community of the faithful, it is important to also consider all the Churches which have contributed to our spiritual formation. After all, life takes us to many places, and in many directions, and there will be many significant moments along the way.

In order to do so, I'd like to share a short reminiscence from some of the significant Churches in my spiritual journey:

- The first Church I regularly attended was St Matthew's in Albury. As a girl chorister, I saw what it was to be part of a community that was shaped by friendship, compassion, warmth and hospitality. This was a formative experience that showed me what it means to live out the Christian calling to love others.
- The Church I was baptised in was Christ Church, South Yarra. This was a place which showed me how to connect my mind to my faith, and how to use both to the full. A parishioner there for almost two decades, this Church was where I grew in faith, and ultimately made the decision to pursue theological education.
- The Cathedral in which I was ordained was St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne. That moment showed me that I was committing myself to something that was far greater than myself, but would allow me to use all that I have to serve God and serve God's people. The sense of God's presence with me in that moment was palpable.
- I first celebrated the Eucharist at St John's in Camberwell. That Church offered me the opportunity to express the overwhelming hospitality of God, and to share that generosity with the congregation there. It is a powerful moment when as a newly ordained priest, you celebrate for that very first time.
- And then there is this Parish; All Saints, South Hobart. This Church chose to trust me to be its Rector, and I hope that I repay that trust and confidence in my ministry. It has showed me already that the work is hard, but worthwhile; and the goodwill of the people of this Parish and their prayers sustain me more than I can say.

This Mothering Sunday, I encourage you to think over the Churches that have played a significant role in your own Christian journey, and to give thanks for them. Whether you were there only briefly, or whether they have been a long-term feature of your life, they all mean something significant to us, and most likely have taught you something significant

about God and the people of God. Let us celebrate that today as we mark Mothering Sunday.

Today is also Refreshment Sunday, or Laetare Sunday. Today we visibly relax the austerity of Lent, and allow ourselves a glimpse of festivity in the midst of preparation for Easter. The purple vestments are swapped for rose-coloured vestments, and it is considered a day when any Lenten discipline may be temporarily relaxed.

The reason we do this is to acknowledge that in the midst of our prayerful preparation for Easter, there is also cause for joy. It is important for us to look for what gives us hope, and to acknowledge it with celebration, rather than to remain entirely solemn for the whole season of Lent. In some Churches, there is a temporary return of flowers into the Sanctuary on this day, and the organ is played once more. (Thanks to Anne and Indra, our organ is not silent during Lent, but remains in use to accompany our services and to enhance our worship).

So today, I encourage you to be someone who looks to the good and find that source of hope and encouragement. In the words of the letter to the Ephesians, look to the light and be people of the light and who surround themselves with light. To take a moment from the Gospel, be the people who could celebrate the restoration of the sight of the blind man, not those who criticised the fact that this miracle took place on the Sabbath and quibbled over whether this was appropriate. Let us take our cue from Jesus, who saw human need before him, and responded with love and compassion.

My prayer for us all is that we will indeed take today's celebrations to heart, and use them in the following weeks of Lent as Holy Week draws closer. May they sustain us in our prayerful turning to God, and remind us of the hope that is within us.

And I will end this sermon with some thanks. Yesterday we held an activity day, where we gathered to make Mothering Sunday posies, to prepare the slices of simnel cake to be given out, to make palm crosses, and to pack toiletries and other necessities into dignity bags. Over 30 people came to help with the work, and many more contributed before through the provision of goods. We made over 600 palm crosses, and it was wonderful to see the community gathered to work together in such a convivial manner. My sincere thanks to everyone who participated, and who contributed to make the day such a success, and so positive. Thank you. This was truly a moment when the Christian spirit of working together was truly on display.

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The Fourth Sunday in Lent; 15 March 2026