

## Stewardship Sermon 4.

Sunday 26 March 2017.

### **Parliament Defiled.**

On Wednesday 22 March, the nation was shocked to hear that there had been a terror attack on Westminster, the mother of parliaments. Her defences had been breached after a number of people had been mown down on Westminster Bridge. In truth the death toll – though serious – was slight compared to the attack in Nice when 84 people were killed or in Paris the year before when 12 people were killed. One life is too big a price to pay for cowardice and bullying but an attack on the mother of parliaments is symbolic for this - the oldest seat of democracy in the western world - has been the source of wisdom for centuries as new democracies have emerged and scurried to Westminster for advice.

### **Mothers Special.**

The reaction to this latest attack is not pure emotionalism. An attack on any mother is an outrage. Think of Jo Cox. Mothers are the source of life, the centre of nurture, a place of refreshment and often the centripetal force which holds a family together. We only have to think of Moses in our first lesson – the trouble his mother took to protect him from a ruthless pharaoh and ensure that he was nurtured in a royal household. The same can be said for so many mothers today in Syria who send their children away from the fighting to try and ensure their survival.

Today, Mothering Sunday, is dedicated to mothers as it is half-way through lent and a chance to revive our spirits. That's what mothers do. Westminster, as many pundits have said, attracts a mix of cultures; it is a ferment of ideas; it stands above the partisan and partial. The world looks to it for inspiration and refreshment.

What is little noticed amid the clamour of Wednesday is the part which Westminster Abbey played in the crisis. Over 1000 people were shepherded into the abbey from parliament and elsewhere to find protection until the panic had passed. Not only is Westminster seen as the mother of parliaments but The Church is also seen as our Mother. She gives birth to our faith, to eternal life in us. The Font is seen as tomb and womb as we die to our old, selfish lives and be born again in Christ, the new life.

This church was probably founded by the Romans using the Fosse Way. They brought the faith from Rome and it is also likely that a previous pope donated funds for the repair of the building. Churches spawn other churches. It is interesting to consider what this church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century might spawn.

### **Protection.**

There will be growing concern about the level of protection now given to Westminster. Clearly, Wednesday's terrorist found a weakness in her defences and this will be reviewed. Mothering Sunday also gives us a chance to consider how much we take our mothers for granted. She is always there when we need her – until she is not and then it is too late. We give flowers today but what will tomorrow bring? Are we just engaged in tokenism? Armies of dads will help with the washing

up today but there is a danger that we take all our mums for granted tomorrow. As we do the Church. It is always there – until it is not.

The rich young man in today's gospel falls down at the feet of Jesus. Is this just show, a pretence? We've all done that sort of thing to our mums when we want something special! The rich young man then has a discussion with Jesus. Clearly, he does all the right things. He keeps the commandments, he doesn't defraud, he honours his mum and dad. But there is a hollowness about this man's response and Jesus spots it. He is respectable but is he generous? He keeps the commandments but that can be negative, passive. He might send a text to his mum now and again but what she really craves is love! Similarly, he doesn't steal or defraud but is he ever generous with his riches? Respectability is not enough! Jesus faces him with this challenge ... and he goes away sorrowful.

Even the life of a mother is finite. How can we better show them our love rather than just our respect? That is for each of us to work out. Similarly with The Church. We often take it for granted. We respect its presence but what are we prepared to do actively to support it? Does the Church just deserve our loose change? Do we believe in a loose-change God?

We are in the middle of a Stewardship campaign in the Benefice, thinking how we can better serve our Mother Church. We do it in all sorts of ways and in a week's time many will gather here to sort out the churchyard and the dust and the brass and we shall have lots of fun. That is a wonderful stewardship of our time and talents but we also need urgently to consider the stewardship of our money. All three are important and require serious thought and not a little prayer. As Jesus challenges the rich young man to sell what he has and give it to the poor, so he challenges us in our affluence. We may be affluent and respectable but are we generous? This is disconcerting: a challenge which we do not expect but Jesus addressed a similarly frightened church community by telling them, *'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also'* [Lk. 12.34]

Let me end by telling you of a mother called Ayo. Ayo was from Africa and had come to the UK as a migrant. She and her children were practising Christians and she was used to tithing in her home country (giving a tenth of her income to the church). When she was faced with a migrant's allowance she continued to tithe and dress her children beautifully but the money was running out. We had a tearful conversation, the result of which was that she should stop tithing until she could find a job with a proper income. Then she would start again. Such was her faith and it was unmistakable, palpable.

This is the generosity so often practised in the Third World. How should we respond?

Amen.