

The hymn we sing as an anthem for the gospel procession during Lent (while we are not allowed to use the 'A' word) is "the old 100" – it is a beautiful poem and ancient text sung to a familiar and rousing tune. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

The fourth Sunday of Lent, which historically is also kept as mothering Sunday is a great tribute to this hymn – it is a day of thanksgiving. A day when we give thanks for our Lenten journey so far and we take a little respite or refreshment. It is a day when we give thanks for 'Mother Church' and the life of our parish and all that means for us. For us as a parish today that will also mean our Annual Meeting which will take place after church. Alice in her wardens report make reference to the fact that one of the gifts of this parish is that we are *small and we are positive!* The Hymn we sing reminds us that we give thanks for the gifts we have, for what is before us, and for what we have endured – rather than longing for tomorrow and lamenting yesterday.

On Mothering Sunday we also give thanks for the gift of Motherhood; for many of us this too is a time of thanksgiving, but it will also bring up memories of things that have past, and are no more, and maybe of what we wish could have been.

A day of thanksgiving can often be a challenge because at in any single moment we have things which cause us pain and upset, as much as things for which we are thankful. The gift of the psalms is that we bring all that we are, our cries and our praise to God. And so today we praise God; and in a week such as we have lived through we have much to praise God for.

This week in this city we have seen the very best and the very worst of humanity. We have seen the pain that hate and dysfunction can cause to the innocent, and to those who seek to protect us. And in response to this pain and violence we have seen an outpouring of hope, of care and compassion and solidarity amongst the residents of this city.

On Thursday Fr Laurence and I had a very positive meeting with Islamia School next door planning for the events that we will share together in the coming weeks and months. We all agreed that Wednesday afternoon's events in Westminster are not in the name of religion – whatever any organisation or individual might say. We agree that this does not reflect God or any of our religious beliefs or the way that any of us read our holy texts. We had similar conversations with other schools and institutions locally. And next week all of the primary students next door will come to visit us to hear about Easter. We honour what we can share, what we can give thanks for, and how we can walk together.

But we are not the first people who have had to find how to praise in the face of pain and hardship. The reading we hear from Exodus today takes place against the backdrop of the systematic mistreatment of the Hebrews by Pharaoh which escalates from enslavement (1:11, 13) to ethnic cleansing as Pharaoh commands that the Hebrew boys be killed at birth (verse 16) or drowned in the Nile (verse 22). While

we have not heard the preceding verses, the desperation which leads a mother to leave her new born baby in the bulrushes gives us a keen insight into the kind of psychology of hate that, driven by fear, can move whole societies to engage in genocidal acts.<sup>1</sup>

The story of Moses emerges out of this backdrop of hatred and pain. Fear is possessing a whole generation and yet they have not lost their faith that God will bring liberation. Moses mother places her son in a basket in the hope that it will save his life. It is an act of desperation and I suspect one few of us will ever understand because thankfully we will not have to have faced a situation where we have had to give up such a precious gift in the hope of their survival – but sadly it is a situation which thousands of mothers, and fathers and leaders have had to face – not just in history but now.

Our Gospel reading too holds up to us the same dilemma. In the moment when Mary should be filled with joy, at that moment when she brings her first born son to give thanks to God for his birth, a prophet speaks out. Not only proclaiming the joy and thanksgiving to God for this child who is the Messiah but also warning Mary that this joy will also in time bring to her much pain *'And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, '..... – and a sword will pierce your own soul too<sup>2</sup>.'*

In the midst of the praise of God, the shadow of what is to come is present; and sometimes in the shadows – our praise of God is present and sustains us for what is to come. As Paul reminds us on this Mothering Sunday *Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation<sup>3</sup>.*

I have thought about this a lot this week, in reflecting on the events in Westminster, but also as we hear more about the growing situation of famine in Yemen, Somalia, Sudan and Northern Nigeria. And I have also thought about it as I prepared for our annual meeting and reflecting on our life as a parish in 2016.

It was a challenging year in the life of our community in St Anne's. More than ever the reality that our community is, in part, transient became much clearer. During the year we welcomed another 4 new families to our community, all of who will have moved out of area by mid-2017. We have also said farewell long term members and friends, including Viola Akers and Rev Maggie. We welcomed others who have become more permanent! And we have come to terms with the reality, that for many of us, regular church attendance means is not every week. In addition we have had to live with the consequences of 3 break-ins and an attempted burglary; and the flooding of the first floor of the building which has led to a great deal of repair work and refurbishments.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=972](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=972)

<sup>2</sup> Luke 2: 33-34

<sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 1: 7

These are not things I think we should lament over, rather they add to the dynamic and flexible nature of our community. Amidst the challenges we face, we are also blessed by many things including a privileged place within this local community, and a building which enables to host many local groups and events. This has meant we have been able to continue to improve the building with new carpet and updated heating, and also be creative in the way that we use our space. The church is open every day of the week – which is a great opportunity and one we seek to make more of each day.

Our Mission is generous in our support with, and of, London Inter Faith Centre, Laurence's Larder, Salusbury World, Christian Aid, St Mungo's and Mbollet-Ba School in the Gambia This is not just in terms of money but especially with volunteers which come from within our community in helping all these projects.

We have good relational links with Salusbury School, Islamia School and Rainbow Montessori. We provide a safe environment for many local community groups, who are coming to understand that we host them and welcome them. We have a true gift of hospitality and I think we should be proud of the fact that people feel safe in this building, and welcomed!

The networks we provide through My Move, Tea & Chat, London Inter Faith Centre, and occasional offices (funeral and feast days) have a lasting impact on our local community.

Most importantly I have really valued our growth in faith and in sharing with one another about our lives – not just in the 2-minute slot, but in the conversations over coffee and the care that is offered to others in the community and beyond. Prayer is at the heart of our life of faith and it is at the heart of our community – and public prayer is offered at least once, and on some days 2 or 3 times each day in this building.

One of the gifts of the Church of England is that we are not a church for ourselves – that is –we don't just exist for our worship. We have a clear role to play in the local community. This gives us rights as well as responsibilities. Part of this engagement is about just being present.

We continue to have many challenges that lie ahead of us in the coming years as we work out how we might grow the congregation and help others also recognise the love of God. I was reminded of a quote from Antione de Saint-Exupery recently "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people together to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea". We can continue to grow in faith as we help each other, and others, find a love and passion for God.

I, we, have so much to praise God for. We have so many ways that we support each other, and the wider community. Thank you to you all for the contributions you each make to the life of our community – whether in practical tasks from committee's or cleaning or flowers – to support of our charities financially – to your daily prayer and passion for God. I continue to thank God each day for you all and pray that we continue to grow in faith, courage and hope. So let us praise God today, and give thanks for all that is good, and that like the mothers of Moses and Mary we may have the courage to continue to pray and have faith. Amen.