

## Sermon 14<sup>th</sup> March for Mothering Sunday

Psalm 107, the psalm appointed for this 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent, says: ***let the redeemed tell their story.*** Our Lent theme is all about telling our stories and we have heard some inspiring testimonies and look forward to hearing more. It is good to talk and also good to listen. It has been said that as God created humans with only one mouth but two ears – maybe listening is more important than speaking!

Both talking and listening are skills we learn. As little children we learn these skills from whoever parents us; perhaps for us it was our mother, father, foster carer or grandparent. Often, though not always, it is our mother who spends most time with us when we are small – and today we are particularly remembering our mothers with gratitude for all they have done for us.

Have you heard the expression – ***he or she needs a good talking to!*** Very often this means an adult thinks a younger person needs to be told where they are going wrong! I remember once seeing an advertisement for a children's charity with the picture of a downcast teenage boy with the caption ***He needs a good listening to!*** There are many people today as a result of the pandemic need a good listening to.

It is a basic need to have someone willing to listen to us – to listen to our fears and anxieties also our hopes and joys, someone who can give us their full attention. As a hospital chaplain I was told to give every person encountered my unconditional positive regard. Counsellors are trained to listen non-judgementally - easier said than done. However you do not need to be a counsellor or chaplain to really listen to someone – listening in itself is healing – you do not need to solve the other's problems – just be present and listen. You have all heard of the Samaritans and other phone help-lines – those who answer the calls are there to listen. I once led a Bible and Psychology study course which I found really helpful and have always remembered this phrase: ***The experience of being listened to is so close to the experience of being loved as to be indistinguishable.***

Consider for a moment – you want to speak to a friend or relative – do you ever stop and wonder if it is a good time for you to be calling that person? Possibly you do - as they might be busy with work, childcare, watching a favourite TV programme, eating or sleeping? Now consider – do you ever wonder if it is the right time to speak to God? I doubt it, as we believe God is always available and ready to hear our prayers. Our God is a listening God. The story is told of an elderly man who would sit for hours on end in church. One day a priest asked him what God talked to him about *God doesn't talk, he just listens* was his reply. Well then what do you talk to God about? asked the priest. *I don't talk either. I just listen* said the old man.

But our God does also speak to us..... through the world around us, through words of scripture, hymns, literature, poetry, music, through the words and experiences and stories of other people and sometimes when we are still and silent seeking God in our hearts.

From the Bible today we heard a familiar story about Nicodemus, a Pharisee – a prominent religious leader who came late one night to visit Jesus. I wonder what stood out for you from this story? As it is Mothering Sunday was it the words about being born again from your mother's womb? But when Nicodemus queried this as being humanly impossible, Jesus replied ***you're not listening***. Jesus said I am not talking about human rebirth but a spiritual new birth without which no one can enter God's kingdom. Nicodemus was sure his own understanding of Jesus was right which meant he was not open to hear and believe that Jesus is the Son of God and he could not understand that for anyone who believes this of Jesus it is such a life changer that it is like being born again. The God revealed in Jesus is a God whose love knows no bounds and who offers us the gift of his Spirit. In the hymn *Spirit of God* were the words: ***without your help we fail our Lord, we cannot live his way – we need your power, your strength, following Christ each day.***

So listen up! And hear what God is saying to you in the next hymn and I pray it may be true for each one of us in the coming days -that we ***lean on the everlasting arms of God*** as we walk in the pilgrim way – the way of love, truth and justice. Amen