

St Botolph's Church Worthing

Mothering Sunday

Psalm 34, v11-20; Colossians 3: 12-17; John 19 v25-27.

Father Roger Walker

Mothering Sunday is hardly the event of the year at St Botolph's – I have been in a parish where it had the largest congregation of the year – more than Christmas, Easter or Remembrance Sunday. So, Mothering Sunday being a quiet occasion perhaps gives us an opportunity to reflect on the nature of our mission here in this Church. One of the features of Churches in towns should be that they each have a different focus to their ministry, because Parish boundaries mean very little in a town. How many of you even know where ours are? People attend the Church whose life and worship draws them closest to God.

If we look at Worthing we see our neighbours at St Matthew's with an emphasis on youth and children's work with informal worship that is largely non-sacramental. Move to St Andrew's and you find a complete contrast in an Anglo-Catholic Church with worship centred entirely on the Eucharist and conducted in a very structured and ceremonial way. Move on into the town centre is Christ Church, with its emphasis on evangelical life and worship. Those are our neighbours: where do we stand and what are we trying to do? Let's look first at our strengths: this is a congregation that has held together and fought off attempts to close the Church. That should give us the sense of unity spoken of in our Epistle reading from Colossians, and that unity grows from love, forgiveness and holiness of life.

Our circumstances, and the fact that we only have our Sunday service – which used to be by the Parish Communion movement as 'all the Lord's people together on the Lord's day' – what we know we need is more of the Lord's people to be here on the Lord's day and this raises the question of where our evangelistic efforts should be directed. But before we look at this let's move on in Colossians to the verse that speaks of singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in our hearts to God.

One thing St Botolph's has preserved, and many of our neighbours have not, is a good sized, able and dedicated Choir. This makes it much easier to worship God in song. What we have so far in our St Botolph's ethos is a sense of unity fostered by having one Parish Eucharist and music that enhances our worship. Next, let's look at ourselves: we vary in age: we are better balanced between men and women than many Churches. Our average age is, shall we say, not as young as in some Churches, although certainly not as old as in others. This is a factor that affects who we should concentrate on reaching out to, for we all know that we are most comfortable with PLUs – people like us. That would seem to go against much of the inclusive teaching of Jesus in the Gospels.

I would not say this in a village Church, but here, the Church is not just St Botolph's, it is us plus our neighbours in Worthing. Together we make up an inclusive Church: we don't all have to do everything!

So here we are – partly by an accidental history – but largely, I do believe, by God's purpose – a Church that reflects the centre ground of Anglicanism rather than the two wings that our neighbours reflect. We are a Church that seeks to offer to God good, reverent, dignified and liturgical worship, again, within the centre ground of the Church of England.

We have a lot to offer: we will appeal to many people who have drifted from the practice of their Christian faith, because they found it difficult to cope with the many changes in the Church of England over recent years – some of them good, and reflected here. We have got to find those people who are around us in the Parish. They do exist: they have a fund of goodwill towards the Church and they are not averse to returning to the fold.

The last verse of our Colossians reading shows how we should approach them 'whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus'. We have to be brave in talking to others: this Church being saved from closure is a good starting point. We have to live lives that reflect that our Christian faith is real: nobody is going to listen to someone they think is a hypocrite. Seemingly not much here about Mothering Sunday, but if we go right back to the origins of this celebration we find that it is about our Mother the Church, and this is what we have been reflecting on as we look at it - bigger than St Botolph's, and indeed bigger than the Church in Worthing.

AMEN

Father Roger Walker

6.3.16