

# *St Stephen with St Julian Together in Prayer*



St Stephen  
with St Julian

Mothering Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2020  
Fourth Sunday of Lent

Welcome to our weekly 'Together in Prayer'. Our aim is to provide some spiritual food during these challenging times. There will be a reflection on the readings set for the Sunday, some questions to ponder and some prayers. We may not be a community worshipping together in our church, but we can still be a worshipping community.

## Reflection

The 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent has traditionally been Mothering Sunday in the UK, hailing back in time to when people, especially those working away from home in 'service' would be allowed the day to return to their 'mother' or 'home church'. It's thought that as families were reunited that this also became a family celebration.



We have found ourselves in the exact opposite of this, as we cannot gather together at church. Many of us will be distanced from our families too at this time. We are living through uncharted waters and in these last few days, extreme measures have been put in place and quite suddenly life isn't the same anymore.

The Old Testament and the Gospel reading both have much to say about mothers who had to face difficult times. Moses' birth mother Jochebed (Ex 6:20, Num 26:59) has to hand Moses over to an uncertain future not once but twice. During her pregnancy she must have known of the terrible fate that would await her son, to be thrown into the crocodile infested waters of the Nile (Ex 1:22). In desperation, she uses her practical skills to create a basket to hide him in. This is a reckless act of protection but it also a point where she is faced with an impossible choice. If she keeps him close to her (as most mothers would want to do), he will be killed. But the choice she goes for is the option of an uncertain future. This is the one that ultimately leads to life for Moses and all that comes after in the story of Exodus. This is a huge example of faith because she had no idea how this would end for him. As it turned out, she is hired to be his wet-nurse (Ex 2:9) which gives her some precious time with her son before she has to give him up again (Ex 2:10).

She does what she can to give him the chance of a future and then she hands it over to God. Even though, it means giving up her son to the family of the oppressive rulers. Yet all through this, God's greater plan is a work. God's salvation for his people and the forming of the nation is all to be accomplished through this baby boy. Jochebed provided her son with life, protection and then she lets him go into God's hands. Moses becomes one of the greatest national leaders, a patriarch and legislator. The one who would liberate the Hebrew people from their oppression in Egypt.

In the gospel reading, we find Mary near the cross watching her son die. Just like Jochebed, she had given him life and protection, and then had to give him away. Both these women lived under oppression and both bore sons who would liberate people. Jesus' life gave us the direction and teaching we need for life, and life in its abundant form. However, so much more in his death, Jesus is our salvation and the way to the Father. He has liberated us from far more than just what's in front of us.

As these women have showed us, they lived in very difficult times. We too have found ourselves living in unprecedented times. We can only do so much with our practical skills but then we give the rest to God, in what can seem like a very uncertain future. During the bleakest of times for Mary, Jesus prepares a new family for her (Jn 19:26-7), a new community to be a part of. We are so blessed to be a community where we can support one another during these difficult times and remember we are also part of the whole church of Christ spanning across the globe. As a team we are trying to find ways of keeping our worship and fellowship going even if it's by post, telephone, email or Facebook. In these uncertain times we need to keep watch for signs of life and resurrection. Ultimately, we are an Easter people and hope in life



beyond this life so let us support one another, in whatever ways we can, as we journey together towards the cross.

Have you experienced a 'certain death or uncertain future' time in your life?

Is there a situation that you now need to hand over to God?

What signs of life can you bring to mind?

## Prayers

Father, we pray for those working to keep us safe. For our frontline health workers, teachers still looking after our children, our government workers, those working in the food industry in production and in supplying food to our shops, for those in the emergency services and all those working in roles we easily forget, yet we depend on them.

*Lord, in your mercy...hear our prayer*

Father, we pray for those who are directly affected illness, especially those suffering with the Corona virus throughout the world. We pray for their protection, for their loved ones. Father, the knock-on effect in people's lives is huge, sometimes more than we can think about.

*Lord, in your mercy...hear our prayer.*

Father, we pray for our children whose education has been abruptly halted. For those who would have come to the end of a long period of studies and are now not knowing what their future will look like.

*Lord, in your mercy...hear our prayer.*

Father, we are bombarded with news and the latest developments in the global response to the Corona virus. Please help us to be sensible as we live in these trying times. Help us to be a people of hope. May we know your presence, peace and comfort.

*Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our saviour Jesus Christ. Amen*

And something a friend shared on Facebook, from Pope Francis

Tonight before falling asleep, think about when we will return to the street. When we hug again, when all the shopping together will seem like a party. Let's think about when the coffees will return to the bar, the small talk, the photos close to each other. We think about when it will be all a memory but normalcy will seem an unexpected and beautiful gift. We will love everything that has so far seemed futile to us. Every second will be precious. Swims in the sea, the sun until late, sunsets, toasts, laughter. We will go back laughing together. Strength and courage. See you soon!

