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It's Saturday 21st March 2020 and the UK is in lockdown. I'm sitting in The Rectory kitchen typing with a heavy heart. Today, at this moment, I should be on the pistes in Wengen Switzerland having one last run down the mountains before returning to Hotel Falken to get dressed up for my son Jack and Georgie's wedding celebration. The navy dress and coat and matching shoes sit in the cupboard upstairs....and Jack and Georgie who were married quickly in front of just two witnesses in a London registry office this week are now isolated and wild camping and perhaps skiing in Scotland. Here in The Rectory, I sit surrounded by my family and our dogs - Charlie boarded a train 8 days ago to return home for his brother's wedding so that we could fly out on Monday 16th ...but it was not to be. On route home he heard that Edinburgh university had closed, so somehow he must make the return journey to empty his flat and retrieve his car as he will be studying at the Sorbonne in Paris from September.



Billy, Charlie, our girls Rhianna and Jasmine, and I are learning how to live in this new Corona Virus world. On Monday last we took the difficult decision to keep the girls at home rather than at school because I have a history of hospital admissions for bilateral pneumonia and treatment for Bronchiectasis, so for us it seemed wise to isolate as much as possible. Having sons who are doctors drove our decision. Peter represented the junior doctors at a consultants' emergency meeting and came to supper bearing difficult news - put simply "we don't have enough ventilators and we will therefore be making hard decisions when thousands need them". So now, along with most of you, we are at home - giving thanks for and praying for those, who like my sons, will be working to care for and treat those who fall victim to this virus. Like many other parents I am worried - another son, Sam, in Bristol is a doctor, he suffers with serious asthma and like his older brothers was born with an immune deficiency. I pray fervently for their well-being but I cannot see Sam on his birthday or Peter who lives close by but is exposed to the virus. On the frontline they are fearful and Peter is sad - his own marriage in June 2020 to Lauren has had to be cancelled. Lauren is now considering returning to nursing as her pharmaceutical employer has asked her to work from home. I am a proud but concerned parent.

Last night the Prime Minister announced that pubs, cafes and restaurants along with schools must be closed. We join the world of William, another son, and Emily his wife, a British Diplomat, in Paris who have been locked down for a while. Our children are confused, our seniors are home alone and nervous, our businesses people and working population worried about their futures. Nobody's life is untouched. Most of us are anxious. My own situation is a little microcosm of a huge and worrying picture. No one I know has died - yet. Our sons tell us they will unless we all take tremendous care. I pray for the families who watch and wait and mourn and I know you will be doing the same. Perhaps praying is all some of us can do now - and we shouldn't feel bad about that for we know prayer changes us and those around us. Keep banging on heaven's door.

Will this new world we live in lead to new understandings, more compassion, greater love for our neighbour? I hope so. Yesterday, the Bishop asked whether us clergy would assist as chaplains in The Heath - caring for patients and staff alike. My heart is breaking, if it were any other virus I would be the first to say yes. But this one affects our lungs and I am vulnerable. I hope I am being sensible not self-indulgent in assuming this parish, my children and my husband would not want me to put myself at risk and be another good Christian martyr. I pray you too are looking after yourselves and helping others if you safely can.

On a normal Saturday I would be piecing together in my head the Sunday sermons - its Mothering Sunday tomorrow and +Richard was going to preside as I should be in Wengen but its hard not to feel a deep desire to reach out to you all, sending you my love, my prayers and perhaps a little thought for tomorrow even though I find writing a sermon down incredibly difficultso here goes, please forgive my scatter gun thought processes I can only preach from the heart and usually without notes!

A short reflection for 22nd March 2020 - my son Dr Samuel Burrows 27th birthday and my second Mothering Sunday in the Parish of Radyr

Two weeks before my sister was born in 1963 “Nannie Sanderson” arrived to care for Katie, the new baby and her 2 year old sister Vicki. Some 15 years later our beloved Nannie retired. We missed her like crazy and our parents who were busy people travelling to London each day to run their business and their life together promptly sent Katie and I to boarding school. Nannie had been our second mother - it was she who bound up our wounds and kissed us goodnight most days. It was Nannie who watched over us like a mother hen as we grew up - who made our meals and arranged our play dates, who took delight in our triumphs and nursed us through our failures. In retirement she looked after my oldest son three days a week when I went back to work. She delighted in watching my 5 children being born and growing up. I sat with Nannie as she was dying - her last words to me were “tell Katie, how much I love her”. I have tears running down my face as I write this. Our family understands that you don’t have to physically nurse a child to be her mother. Nannie would have loved to be at Jack’s wedding - she was his godmother too.

My own mother’s Nannie became my godmother. NIBS as she was known had always been part of my own mother’s life - looking after her when she was born until the war effort came and she left to work in a London orphanage. Throughout her life NIBS remained close to my mother - calling her each night to see how her day had been - and they both adored the other. I remember sitting with NIBS in the Royal Surrey Hospital as her life ebbed away - her last words to me were, “look after your mother when I’m gone”. NIBS had mothered my mother and now she was asking me to mother my own - perhaps she’d seen those early glimpses of dementia that I had not spotted even though she was physically blind in her latter years. The roles were soon reversed as my own mother’s capacity declined. Years later I thought of NIBS as I attempted to shower my mother and change her soiled nappy as Alzheimer’s Disease took over her life.

Mothering Sunday cannot only be about being a mother through childbirth or even blood relationships – it’s about mothering and caring for others. In chapter 19 of John’s gospel as Jesus hangs on the cross he says to John, perhaps his closest friend, “son here is your mother”. And to his mother he says “mother here is your son” - and from that point on we are told, his friend took his mother into his own home. I often wonder who mothered who.

In these strange times of isolation we are learning how to mother and care for each other - perhaps at a distance. On Monday when I’m officially back from my “holiday”, that never was, in Switzerland I shall begin to make contact with you by phone, Skype, FaceTime, WhatsApp, our website and through various digital communications. Whilst public worship is suspended for the safety of all my prayers for you will continue. Please do be in touch with me by calling if there’s anything I can do to offer pastoral or practical help. Please, please remember nothing is too small or too insignificant - and much can be done or arranged by making a call. Just as my mother and her Nannie would chat each night, the balm of conversation healing the wounds and troubles or loneliness of the day, I hope you will reach out to me if you need any pastoral support.

Whilst writing this short reflection I was interrupted by two calls, one from a restaurant asking how some food could be distributed to those in need - naturally I offered some ideas and so I very much hope the most vulnerable in our society will receive food later today. The second call came from a worried lady who is self-isolating due to her 93 year old mum yet wondering how she could collect a little puppy from me ...little Leila one of five pups born to Lola, Jasmine’s Cavalier King Charles, will receive one last cuddle from us then be passed out in a cardboard box to begin her new life with Sally later this week. We are all reinventing ourselves and as Christians trying to show God’s love and compassion in new ways.

As we enter into a new way of being may God bless you and yours,

With my love as always,
Vicki

