

## **Sermon and report as written for 22 March 2020, Mothering Sunday.**

As we know, today is Mothering Sunday as well as our APCM and I want to consider for a moment, as a setting for my annual report, on what it is to become a parent.

Now we all know that in pregnancy, a woman experiences changes both physically and mentally and afterwards her whole life changes. A father also needs to prepare for and accept change.

A while back I told a story about twins in the womb. One was prepared to face the changes of birth, the insecurity of entering a new world, but the other wasn't, refused to change and died. If we aren't prepared to face change, we will die.

The church is no different. We all know that if we don't change, we won't grow. We cannot retain our old ideas, old routines and old customs if we want to draw in others.

Now, I would suggest that our main consideration for the year ahead should be focussed on outreach. We do have many events that reach out to the community, but I wonder if we shouldn't be doing more, being more proactive in trying to give people the gospel news. We have new builds going up everywhere. What are we doing to inform people about St Peter's and the good news of the gospel to encourage them to come to us? Are the people of Earle Gardens, for instance, even aware of our existence? My charge to PCC this year is to address this challenge head on and focus on that. It may require us to change. Are we, like loving parents, prepared to put this baby, this promise of new life and growth, first?

But in case that sounds as though we have done no outreach, I want to highlight some of the areas where we have reached out this year.

Much of the year has been focussed on the repair of the organ and, indeed, the funding applications have necessitated that we consider how the organ can be used for outreach. It will hopefully be a powerful tool in the community, with recitals, services etc and I look forward to being able to have a great service of thanksgiving for the organ and for all those who have worked so hard to secure funding for it.

During the year past, we have received the bronze eco-church award and I hope we are able to move onwards, setting an example to our community, to reach the silver and, eventually, gold. My thanks to the eco-church team who work so hard.

During the year we had only 2 weddings but more are in the pipeline. We continue to baptise and bury and I can only pray that sometimes the families would return to church. However, God works in many ways and just that act of pastoral care creates a sense of love and support from the church. People will feel that, in a crisis, we are always there for them, and that is what matters. I am continually encouraged by people who comment on what a friendly, caring community we are. This is bringing God's love to birth.

My thanks to my wonderful churchwarden, Kath, who never fails to give me support and encouragement, and also to Steve, to be licensed as a reader. I can't think what I would do without you both! And also a special thanks to Jackie, my PCC secretary, who is truly a star. I know it's stressful sometimes Jackie, but I really appreciate it.

I'm not going to mention others as they are too numerous and I'd be sure to leave out someone but I remember saying something in a sermon a while back asking people to ask themselves if they could be doing anything more. I glanced at the congregation and realised, with thanksgiving, that there wasn't a single person sitting there who wasn't engaged in a church activity of some kind except for one or two who had every good reason to be taking a break! Thank you all.