

## **Address at the Service of Evensong**

Trinity College Chapel, 8 May 2016

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There are few so-called universal truths that we can all really agree on but it's pretty clear that we all have mothers! Today is, of course, Mother's Day and perhaps, like me, you are wrestling hard in your inner being and in your public discourse to make this a day that celebrates the sacred and remarkable fact and substance of motherhood, indeed parenthood, instead of surrendering to commercial and superficial imperatives.

In Australia and America, and much of the world, Mother's Day is the second Sunday in May. This is the result of a proclamation by US President Woodrow Wilson in 1914, in response to a sustained and public campaign by an American citizen Anna Jarvis, whose own mother had died on the 9<sup>th</sup> May some years before. It has become an enduring institution.

In our Church we also have Mothering Sunday, a much more longstanding festival, although one which had lost its prominence in the Anglican Church by the turn of the twentieth century. Its revival is attributed to an English woman, Constance Smith, who was also inspired by the US campaign led by Anna Jarvis. Constance Smith, a High Anglican, believed that "a day in praise of mothers" was fully expressed in the liturgy of the Church of England for the fourth Sunday of Lent. This is not entirely clear from the liturgy for that day but the Lesson at least declares: "Jerusalem which is above is free; which is the mother of us all."

It is likely that this Sunday harked back centuries to the pre-Reformation connotations of Laetare Sunday, on which the Introit says: "Rejoice, O Jerusalem: and come together all you that love her ... and be filled from the breasts of your consolation." Some scholars recommend that Laetare Sunday's connections with mothers may have come through it being the day to visit the mother church or cathedral.

Some customs of the day outlived the Reformation. These included making a simnel cake and taking it to Mother. "I'll to thee a Simnel bring, / Gainst thou go'st a Mothering," wrote the poet Robert Herrick in the mid 17th-century.

Constance Smith reconnected simnel cakes and other customs of the day that survived with the honouring of mothers. In 1920, under the penname C. Penswick Smith, she published a booklet entitled *The Revival of Mothering Sunday*. The idea caught the imagination of many and became a modern tradition, probably encouraged by the feelings of many mothers and families who had lost sons in the First World War.

Mother's Day in England is still celebrated on Mothering Sunday, that is, the fourth Sunday of Lent. Perhaps we should seize the moment of public conversation about fixing the date of Easter and lobby for Mother's Day to be set annually on a day of deeper spiritual and historical significance, although the prospect of supermarkets groaning under the combined weight of Easter eggs and Mother's Day specials is not a pretty one.

Reading on the history of Mothering Sunday and Mother's Day prompted for me the possibility that we might launch a campaign to declare that we have a designated day to celebrate the place and contribution of women in the life and history of Trinity College.

Although our College began as a determinedly male institution it has been the home and wellspring for many remarkable women. Their influence on Church and state has been considerable, and their contribution to the academy and the professions outstanding.

In a sense it would be about recognising the female voice in Trinity, that clear and vitally important voice that is at times muffled by the maleness of our world and the forces of our local history. This voice has also been disguised to some degree in our contemporary College by the evolution of the Trinity Women's Hostel, established in 1886 through the leasing of 'two large and comfortable houses for ten lady students attending lectures at Trinity College', to Janet Clarke Hall, which was officially separated from Trinity in 1961, although in fact had been known as Janet Clarke Hall from 1921.

Whilst one might choose to begin this necessarily eclectic exploration with Edith Carington née Horsfall (1863–1908) to whose memory our splendid Chapel was dedicated in November 1917, the clearer public voice of those times was Janet Lady Clarke. Although not an alumna of the College, she was a remarkable citizen and force for good, including for the Church of England. Her gift of £5,000 to the Building Fund to erect a new women's hostel at the University was made on the expectation that the institution would be in the control of the Church of England, rather than non-denominational in character. This condition, sensibly, was agreed to by the trustees and of course one of the consequences is that our Chapel has been an important place of shared worship for women and men for almost one hundred years.

By way of contrast and of illustration of the times another benefactor made a significant bequest on the condition 'that every woman student entering residence should begin and pursue to the end a course of study having for its object the obtaining of a diploma or certificate in domestic economy or cookery'. This clause was thought sound because it complemented the fact that at that time Australian law required all young men to do a course of compulsory military training to prepare themselves to defend their country.

Lady Clarke's further contributions to education included helping to establish the College of Domestic Economy, acting on the committee to extend Church of England schools for girls, and serving on the council of the Melbourne Church of England Grammar School for Girls. In 1904 she was president of the University Funds Appeal that raised £12,000.

Another formidable voice in our Church and College was that of Miss Valentine Leeper. An occasion such as this cannot do justice to her activism, relentless pursuit of causes, eminent, respected and at times feared public voice, and vision for social justice. Daughter of the first Warden, Alexander Leeper, she lived to be a hundred, and never lost her passion for Trinity College or the Church of England. She was, historian Marion Poynter points out, above all, her father's daughter. She defended stoutly Warden Leeper's vision and values for the College, captured in the motto he chose, 'Pro Ecclesia, Pro Patria' – for Church and for country.

By way of example, Valentine was shocked to read in the *Age* on 9 February 1961 that Janet Clarke Hall, for her perhaps her father's most important Trinity memorial, was to become an independent college, and a determined campaign of letter writing and lobbying commenced. The Archbishop of Melbourne Frank Woods, and Warden Cowan were the principal players

in the ensuing drama, but were perhaps constrained to some degree by their reluctance to acknowledge publicly that the change was linked to a new Commonwealth policy of making grants to individual colleges.

Valentine Leeper is remembered for her advocacy and action in the Victorian Aboriginal Group and her lifelong concern for improving conditions for Indigenous people. This visionary group was striving in the 1930s and 1940s to 'arouse the public conscience in favour of a just and enlightened treatment of the native survivors'. She was also deeply engaged in the League of Nations, the United Nations, the politics and consequences of World War Two and women's rights.

The recent death of Dame Leonie Kramer draws attention to and prompts thanks for many remarkable generations of "Trinity women", some of whom are remembered in portraits hung at Trinity. Dame Leonie's leadership and achievements in university education and governance, is matched by the work of Fay Marles, past Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, and Victoria's first Equal Opportunity Commissioner. Other portraits in our Dining Hall at present capture and project important voices – surgeon Susan Lim, philanthropists Elisabeth Murdoch and Louise Gourlay, Anglican Church leader and lawyer Rowena Armstrong, first female students Lilian Alexander and Melian Stawell, first Indigenous students Sana Nakata and Lily Brophy-Brown, and of course the present Bishop of Gippsland, the Right Reverend Kay Goldsworthy.

Lest we miss the moment, we also celebrate the recent election of our colleague and friend the Reverend Canon Professor Dorothy Lee as a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, and last week to the Standing Committee of the Anglican Church of Australia's General Synod, the executive of the highest national body in the Church. Dorothy is clearly one of our most important and audible modern Trinity voices, and I have a suspicion that our Tutor and Chorister Miranda Gronow, recently acclaimed as the Medalist or Dux of the Faculty of Arts, and our emerging theologians the Reverend Christy Capper and the Reverend Jazz Dow are also going to find their voices in the academy and Church in the near future. We are in fine company indeed and we have much to be proud of in the past 150 years or so.

At the risk of being self-indulgent, I want to conclude by returning to what is for many of us, I hope, the true nature of Mother's Day, and to raise the possibility of my own Mother's voice being here at Trinity, albeit vicariously. She was for me a saintly figure and although she died far too young she has never really left me. She was a very loyal Anglican and would be delighted that her boy was preaching at Trinity today.

She is around most mornings making sure my shirt is ironed and that I look smart, and she often turns up sitting next to me at the footy and cheering our team on. She may well be responsible for my offbeat and pervasive sense of humour, for which we jointly apologise!

Although she died more than 40 years ago she still likes going to work each day and helping me think things through, reminding me that a good life is about service, compassion and respect.

Thanks be to God for all our Mothers, and for their love and care and wisdom. Amen.