

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> November – Flourishing with God

Malachi 4:1-2a

2 Thess 3:6-13

John 15:1-11

We've had two new babies in our family this year, in addition to the two that were born last year and five other grandchildren born in the years before that. So our house is full of baby pictures. Everyday we are signposted to new photographs and video clips that have been put onto an internet photo sharing site. Rupert was born to my daughter Hannah and her husband Ben, and Zachary to my son Chris and his wife Rosie last year; and this year Ellie to Kate's son Mickey and his wife Sarah, and Ezra most recently to Kate's other son Ally and his wife Sophie.

I don't know about you, but when I look at small babies I think about their potential. What will this child become? What will their character be like? What will be their particular skills? What will they enjoy doing? Where will they live? What does the future hold for them in terms of happiness and sadness, sorrows and joys? And bigger things like what will the world in which they will live in be like with all the political and technological changes and worry about global warming and its effects.

I think about the love and support they will be shown by their parents and those closest to them; the teaching, the example, the advice, the correction, the encouragement, the feeding, the consoling, the guiding, the nurturing and all the other help and care they will be given as they grow, as they journey through life. And all this love and support will, we hope, help them become the very best they can be – to fully realise the potential that is stored up within them. To become the best Ellie, or the best Ezra or whoever that they can be

Parenting is a huge task – and one which none of us are really suitably qualified for. I was kind of encouraged the other day when Chris said to me that, particularly in the days when he finds being a parent is hard (and I'm sure all parents have been there!), he admires what his mother and I did for him!

In our gospel reading Jesus talks of the way we can realise our potential as followers of him. At the beginning of our Christian life, our journey of faith, we are a bit like babies. We need all the help and encouragement and nurture we can get. He describes it as being like branches on a tree. The branches can only

reach their full potential in terms of health and producing fruit if they are part of the tree, receiving nutrients from the tree, being fed and being protected by the tree. He says that he is like that tree, and its as if as Christians we are part of him in the same way a branch is part of the tree while still retaining its identity as a separate branch. If we are not part of that tree, then we can never reach our potential and we will wither and die.

And reaching our potential as Christians means not only believing and trusting in God for everything we are and do, it also involves producing fruit. The apostle Paul describes the fruit as Love joy peace patience kindness generosity faithfulness gentleness and self control – he calls this the fruit of the spirit. In many ways this fruit is the outward evidence of us being a Christian. When we are producing this fruit we could say that we are flourishing in our faith – which is what has been at the heart of our sermon series these past few weeks.

So for us to flourish, for us to reach our potential we have to be part of Jesus – part of his church – which we call the body of Christ – so that the very life of Christ, the life of God, flows through us. We could say this is being filled with God’s spirit. His breath, his life within us nurturing, encouraging, feeding, teaching and leading us.

And part of that flourishing, that fruit bearing, is helping others reach their potential as Christians as well. Helping others on their journeys with God as they learn, develop and grow so that they too can produce that same fruit that we have spoken about. And we have seen how this works recently in the Parish when on the Moving On course members have helped each other by sharing and talking together.

Many of us, however, are daunted by the thought of helping someone else in their Christian life, helping someone else on their faith journey, so I thought we could think today about one area which is not so threatening and which I suspect each one of us is in a position to do something.

We started this morning by talking about babies – in particular my grandchildren, their potential and how they might be nurtured to fulfil that.

Lets now think about our own grandchildren or great grandchildren if you have any (otherwise perhaps nephews and nieces, or even for the younger ones amongst us our own children), but certainly about the younger ones within our

wider family circles. What about them realising their full potential. Being the best they can be.

I know from talking to many of you how disappointed and sad you are because it seems that in many cases your grandchildren are not being encouraged in terms of their Christian faith. They may have been baptised, but they never go to church because their parents – our children – don't go to church. So what we can we do as grandparents and aunts and uncles to help our grandchildren and nephews and nieces reach their potential in terms of faith and belief.

It seems to me that the build up to Christmas is a great opportunity for us to do something. Here are a couple of ideas.

Christmas presents themselves are one – perhaps a book which is aimed at children or teenagers and can help by giving examples of how prayer and trust in God can help in the confusing and sometimes frightening world of modern day school. Ask me and I'll give you some suggestions. For the younger ones perhaps a book of bible stories or prayers. But remember the young today live in a very different world to the one we grew up in. A book which appeals to us because its what we would have liked as a child probably won't appeal to them. In a recent mailing from the Bible Society gives details of the Bible for minecrafters – something I don't understand but my grandchildren probably do – its some kind of computer game!

For your grown up children who seem to have everything, why not show your love for them and your concern for the world by getting a Christian Aid gift like a cow, or clean water for someone in Africa or Asia, or twin one of their toilets with one in the developing world. Look at Christian Aid website or catalogues for more information.

If its possible geographically there are plenty of opportunities to invite grandchildren and others to things here – or perhaps do some research to see whats on in their own local church if distance is a problem. Christmas carol services – we have a couple aimed at children and families. Messy Church on the Saturday before Christmas; the crib services on Christmas eve. Inviting is one possibility, bringing them along yourself would be better. Relieve their parents of the children for an hour or so on Christmas Eve by bringing the young ones to the crib service, or to Messy Church the Saturday before Christmas.

If your grandchildren are older –perhaps teenagers – would they want to help us run things like Messy Church? We are always on the look out for helpers – and teenage helpers relate brilliantly with the younger children. It also looks good in their CV!

And Advent Calendars – instead of the cadburys chocolate calendar why not get one for the grandchildren that tells something of the Christmas story? This one from Traidcraft combines both chocolate and the Christmas story. What could be better. I'd be happy to order a number of these if people wanted.

And just by being a friend to them. Children often form very positive relationships with aunts, uncles and grandparents – and even neighbours!. Use the opportunity to talk about what your faith means to you; offer to pray for your grandchildren or nephews or nieces. Be open about what you believe. They may not listen to parents but could well take seriously what you say!

Like many things, our contribution might only be small, but it could well be remembered. As your grandchild or nephew or niece or whoever grows up they may recall something you said or something you did and, who knows, it could in time help them to fulfil their potential not just as a human being, but also as someone who comes to know and love and serve God – someone who in time comes to bear the same fruit of the spirit that we do.

But for all of us, old and young, what is important is that we strive to become – with the help of God – the very best me I can be. To flourish, to thrive, to really live.