

## Mother's Union: Mary Sumner Day 09.08.15

Today is Mary Sumner Day, the day we celebrate the founding of the Mother's Union. **Q:** What do you see when you look at the Mother's Union? an aging group of ladies who meet to listen to a visiting speaker or to swap cake recipes? **Well this couldn't be further from reality!**

**They are a formidable Christian group within the Church of England.** Yes, they do have visiting speakers and you probably can get a cracking cake recipes at the meetings, but wait... listen to this...

Just a fortnight ago **one hundred** parents and children - in desperate need of a break - were sent on a free **'Away from it all holiday'** to Cleethorpes courtesy of the Mother's Union ; including two fathers and their children. **One hundred!** One child said he had never seen his mum without stress before.

Many of the teddy bears produced here are taken into prisons and recently into The Glen Parva Youth offenders centre for their family day; although I understand one or two said they were stitched up! They were!

Mother's Union members also help with Glen Parva's Alpha and J. John discipleship courses and - in March this year - 10 young men were baptised, given Bibles and celebrated with biscuits; the bread of life in both manna's.

Our branch produces ventilator bonnets and jackets for tiny babies and beautiful shawls for stillborn babies. We also raise funds for overseas development and emergency relief, support homeless relief in Leicester and also literacy and parenting courses here in the UK and overseas.

In other words... if you thought our Mother's Union was some sort of club for **ladies who lunch**, look again... they are a fantastic force for good. Maybe you should join! **Gender** is **no barrier** and they're always looking for new members ... as long as you're prepared to wear a dress... No, I'm joking, just come as you are..... as long as you wearing something and can say with all sincerity that you will support the aims and objectives of The Mother's Union. The more members, the more good they can do.

Mary Sumner like all positive forces for good realised that if you gather a group of people, give them a wide set of aims and objectives to strive to achieve and unite them with a name that'll stand the test of time then you have a **movement**; a movement that will not only live on, but will be able to achieve a great deal through its structure, networks and vision; through its people. Better still, if it is built on a foundation of faith in the teachings of Jesus Christ, you have an organisation that will be directed, supported and enlivened by the Holy Spirit himself (or **herself**).

Now what do you see when you look at the Mother's Union? Impressive eh!

Of course Mary Sumner was inspired by her faith in Christ and her desire to serve him in ways that she felt she was gifted. Isn't that the best way to serve God, by discerning your gifts and offering them to him for the good of the kingdom? **I think so.** And today ... The Mother's Union has a worldwide pedigree of service to the lost, the disadvantaged and those simply in need of a loving embrace. It also provides a wonderful social outlet locally where members can come together, share fellowship and draw strength from each other.

This way of being of course is not new, Jesus drew people together and as well as commandments to follow gave us a focus, **himself**; his body broken on the cross. The night before he died he took two of the simplest things and asked us to remember him and his message of love for each other and for God.

In the first verse of the Gospel reading, we have the first of the 7 great '**I am sayings**' unique to John's Gospel, where Jesus says, '**I am the bread of life! He who comes to me shall never hunger and he who believes in me shall never thirst!**' and then in case you miss it he says it again in verse 48 and 51.

**What's he doing?** He's bearing witness to himself with a big sign saying, '**I am**'; language that the Jews can relate to because it echoes the time when God spoke to Moses and said '**I am who I am**' (Exodus 3:14) which

translates from the Greek as: '**I am the one who is!** God was clearly cool and down with the kids even then.

Jesus is telling the people that he shares in God's eternal existence and brings salvation, life... (As it says in John 5:26 '**For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself**') ...and as Christians, we believe that he has the power to lay down his life and take it up again three days later..... He also has the power to give life to those who keep his word (**It says in John 8:51 'Whoever keeps my word will never see death'**) (**Pause**) So the 'I am' sayings in John's gospel link Jesus with the most intimate relationship with the divine person and work of God.

Well having said, '**I am**' pretty clearly, we hear the Jews complaining about him **or according to the Greek translated : grumbling.....**but this doesn't bother Jesus. He uses their misunderstanding to re-emphasise his message and point again to the sign he has put up. He silences their grumbling by quoting the words of the prophets Jeremiah (31:34) and Isaiah (54:13-14), which the Jews would also have been familiar with. He says; '**It is written in the prophets; 'And they shall all be taught by God' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me'**.

What he's saying is those who believe in Jesus and **take up** his teachings, the word of God which the father sent down from heaven, will have eternal life.

**(Pause)** Just as the Rabbi's thought that the Jews **absorbed** the first five books of the OT by eating the manna, that God sent the Jews in the wilderness; In consuming Jesus **(his word)** who is the bread of life which came down from heaven, **Christians absorb God's teaching.**

And then of course having **absorbed** it they endeavour to live it out in their service to others, in their commitment to the gospel and in their love for their neighbour. Absorb is a great word, the bread broken down, and becoming life giving particles in our blood stream, absorbed into our very life blood; Jesus coursing through us with every beat of the heart.

Life is a gift from God, just as the sustenance was in the wilderness, The son is the bread of life who gives life to the world by his death (6:51). He came himself, he hungered in the wilderness and was stripped naked on the cross. But hungering for us, he became our bread. To believe in him is to come to him and to partake of him. He is the real heavenly bread, the real life sustaining power; anything else is inadequate and we remember this fact when we share in communion.

So as you come forward today to share in the body and blood of Christ, **remember** you eat of the true bread of life and drink of the true vine.

His bread, the imperishable **word of God**, was given for you so take, eat, and absorb it and then share your resurrected life with everyone you meet.

Demonstrate the fruits of the Spirit in your calling to serve just as Mary Sumner did throughout her lifetime and countless members of the Mother's Union have done ever since.

**Dear Father**

**You who sent your only Son to bring us eternal life**

**Keep our focus on the word, on Him who sustains us**

**Help us to live lives worthy of your teaching and encourage us to feed everyone else with your **Word**, the very bread of life.**

**Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.**

**Amen.**