

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



The Church's prayer for this Sunday

God of love,
passionate and strong,
tender and careful:
watch over us and hold us
all the days of our life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Bible readings and reflection for Sunday 14th March 2021

A reading from Exodus 2:1-10

The Birth of Moses

2 Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. **2** The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months. **3** When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes^[a] and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank. **4** And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him. **5** Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it. **6** When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." **7** Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" **8** And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother. **9** And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. **10** When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, "Because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."^[b]

For the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

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A Gospel reading from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 2:33-35

³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

A reflection from Revd Charles Fraser, lead minister in The Eversdens

Those of you who know me well will know that all edge worship is not my real comfort zone A few years ago, I did all age talk that began:

"What day is it today?"

"Sunday" came the answer.

"Yes" I said, "but what Sunday is it?"

Long pause.

A little girl put up my hand and said "the one before Monday"

"Who's done something nice for their mum?" I asked. No hands went up. "Who's going to do something nice."

Total silence. I tried again.

"You don't have to do anything nice. Sometimes you can just stop doing something not nice. What do you think you could stop doing today?"

You guessed it. Total silence.

I was sorely tempted at that point to give up and sit down. So, what then do we know about today, mothering Sunday? No one is absolutely certain how it began. Some people think that Christians adopted it from a Roman festival celebrating Cybele their mother goddess.

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Today's epistle in the Book of Common Prayer gives a special place to the theme of maternal love. Galatians, in chapter four, verse 26, says Jerusalem which is above all is free. It is the mother of us all. During the 16th century, people used to go 'a mothering' on this Sunday, meaning they would go back to their mother church, which was the main church or Cathedral in the area for a service to be held on the fourth Sunday in Lent.

In later times, Mothering Sunday became a day when domestic servants, particularly girls were given a day off to visit their mother church, usually with their own mothers and other family members. It was often the only time that whole families could gather together and, on their way home, they would pick wildflowers along the way to place in the church, or give to their mothers. And this has turned into the tradition of giving mothers a present today.

It might be a long way from the big house to where you worked as a servant to your home. So, the housekeeper or cook would sometimes let the maids bake a cake to take home for their mother or perhaps give them some eggs or flowers.

This Sunday has other names. Some people call it 'Refreshments Sunday'. I believe there's an old Surrey tradition that it's called 'Pudding Pie Sunday'. In America, it's sometimes called 'Mid Lent Sunday'.

Some churches will use the feeding of the 5000 for today's Bible reading, meaning that the fasting rules are relaxed. So arguably, you have permission to go home and eat the chocolate you've given up for Lent. In some traditions, it's called 'Simnel Sunday', because of the tradition of baking a simnel cake. A fruit cake covered in marzipan decorated with 11 marzipan balls, representing the twelve disciples minus Judas. But you're not allowed to eat that until Easter Sunday. But it's not the only cake. Apparently, there are mothering buns or mothering Sunday buns, which are sweet buns topped with pink or white icing and multicoloured hundreds and thousands.

More seriously. Over the years, a number of saints, theologians and spiritual writers have described God in maternal terms. Mother Julian of Norwich wrote, *'as truly as God is our father, so truly is God our mother. To the property of motherhood belong nature, love, wisdom and knowledge, and this is God. The mother can give her child to suck of her milk, but our precious Mother Jesus can feed us with himself, and he does'*

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St Catherine of Sienna compared Christ's sacrifice on the cross to a mother who takes a bitter medicine so her nursing baby can get well again, while St Theresa of Avila compares quiet, contemplative prayer to breastfeeding because God nourishes the soul without the need for words. People sometimes describe a mother's love as sacrificial and self-giving. And this is a clear parallel with God's love for us.

In feeding her baby a mother feeds it from her own body, which reminds us of Christ giving his body for our spiritual nourishment. So, this image of a mother God does work and gives us cause to celebrate motherhood. A mother who searches for the lost coin, the lost sheep, the lost son, a God who suffers pain and self-giving for us his children.

And like any child, our response to this plentiful love often falls short of what it should be.

While some people are quite comfortable with these descriptions of how God works, they wouldn't be very happy to call God mother. But perhaps we need to remember that however we try to describe God, it will never be perfect. That's just not something we can do. But these illustrations are there to help us understand what God is like, and what he's trying to do for us and in us.

Of course, mothers aren't perfect people, neither of fathers, but we can see how God is like a good, loving, earthly father and mother. So, I don't think it matters too much what gender our own personal image of God is. What's more important is how these descriptions of God as father or mother, help us begin to understand how great God's love is - better than the best any human can offer.

And we must acknowledge that this can be difficult, and might not work for anyone who didn't know one or both of their parents, or whose experience of having a mum or dad wasn't a very good one. So today is Mothering Sunday. And it will be odd for many of us this year that we can't visit our mothers as we would like to.

But nonetheless, it should be a day to celebrate. And thank God for the positive aspects of motherhood and God's love for each one of us. And perhaps we ought to stretch it a little bit wider too and celebrate the love and care we receive from all the people all around us, in whatever form we receive it in the socially distance times. It's particularly important perhaps when we are so distanced from each other.

Amen