

Sunday 14th March

Mothering Sunday

Led by Sue Nelms, LLM



Gathering Prayer

The Lord be with you
And also with you.

Heavenly Father, we rejoice with thanks for all those who have mothered us in our lives. In a world that is broken and in need of your motherly love, please use us to aid others as you do us in providing comfort, nurture, protection and support. We ask that you grow us as carers to those who need us, so that we might celebrate your goodness together even through our own brokenness. **Amen**

Hymn – For the Beauty of the Earth

1 For the beauty of the earth,
For the beauty of the skies,
For the love which from our birth
Over and around us lies:
Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our sacrifice of praise.

3 For the joy of ear and eye,
For the heart and brain's delight,
For the mystic harmony
Linking sense to sound and sight
Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our sacrifice of praise.

2 For the beauty of each hour,
Of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale, and tree and flower,
Sun and moon and stars of light.
Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our sacrifice of praise.

4 For the joy of human love,
Brother, sister, parent, child,
Friends on earth & friends above,
For all gentle thoughts and mild.
Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our sacrifice of praise.

5 For each perfect gift of thine,
To our race so freely given,
Graces human and divine,
Flowers of earth & buds of heaven
Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our sacrifice of praise.

6 For thy Church that evermore
Lifteth holy hands above,
Offering up on every shore
This pure sacrifice of love.
Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our sacrifice of praise.

Meditation

Take up a comfortable posture. Close your eyes.

And first, we begin to centre ourselves.

Focus on your breathing.

Notice your breathing in... and breathing out.

Do not try and control it, but just focus on this breathing. In and out.

If you get distracted, do not worry.

But just bring your attention back.

Notice breathing in and out. In and out.

Julian of Norwich wrote “Just as God is our Father, so God is also our Mother”. In chapter 13 of Luke’s gospel, Jesus cries out to the people of Jerusalem “How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.”

In our world today, not all children know loving mothers and not all loving mothers have children. We do all have opportunities, however, to ‘mother’ those in need of such love, following the example given to us by God.

As you breathe in reflect on the hen gathering its brood under its wing. The security offered by that action; the protection, the nurturing. As you breathe out, allow that security, protection and nurturing to enfold you.

Confession

God our Father, as Pharaoh’s daughter noticed the needs of a small child alone in the reeds, so help us to notice those areas of our own lives needing care and attention.

Silence is kept

Therefore, let us confess our sins, seeking the embrace of God's forgiveness and peace.

We have failed to nurture people in need,
Lord have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

We have failed to make space in our lives for broken-hearted people.
Christ have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

We struggle to forgive those who have withheld their love from us.
Lord have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Merciful Lord,
you know our struggle to serve you:
when sin spoils our lives and overshadows our hearts,
come to our aid and turn us back to you again;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Readings by Joshua Vanneck

Exodus 2:1-10

2 Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. ²The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him for three months. ³When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. ⁴His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

⁵The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. ⁶When she opened it, she saw the

child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. 'This must be one of the Hebrews' children,' she said. ⁷Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?' ⁸Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Yes.' So the girl went and called the child's mother. ⁹Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.' So the woman took the child and nursed it. ¹⁰When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, 'because', she said, 'I drew him out of the water.'

Luke 2.33-35

³³And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed - and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

Reflection by Rev Charles Fraser

Those of you who know me well will know that all age 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.

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 ‘Refreshment 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'*

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

Affirmation

Let us declare our faith in God.

**We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family
in heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith,
and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us
with power from on high.**

**We believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession led by Michaela McNeill

Our prayers today pick up themes from Mary's Song (the Magnificat) where Mary was expressing her delight in her unexpected pregnancy.

After the words Lord, hear us, please repeat the words Lord, graciously hear us.

Let us pray

Gracious Father, on this Mothering Sunday we give thanks for the unique privilege of having children to bring up. We feel so unprepared; we feel such responsibility; we often feel so overwhelmed. Help us to rest in the knowledge that we could be asked to do no more important thing than to love, guide and nurture a new life. In doing this we're sharing in your divine activity of loving, guiding and nurturing the whole human race.

And so we pray with Mary;
'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour'.

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for mothers everywhere:

- young mothers overawed by the task, and by the depth of their feelings;
- older mothers thrilled beyond measure that at last a child has come;
- mothers in Britain who are single, scared and poor;
- mothers in many developing countries whose diet is thin and whose milk is scarce.

Hasten the day when mothers everywhere can say with Mary,
'The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name'.
Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for fathers everywhere:

- young fathers, unsure how to be a father and a husband, a lover and a friend;
- fathers in poorer countries wondering how to feed yet another child;
- fathers in the Western world, leaving home too early and coming home too late to share these special years.

Hasten the day when fathers everywhere can say,
'His mercy is for those who fear him, from generation to generation'.
Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for couples everywhere who are without children:

- those who've made the choice and are happy;
- those who've not made that choice and are desperate for a child;
- those who are seeking help and waiting anxiously, month by month;
- those who are trying to adopt and going through a long process.

Hasten the day when all who want children can say,
'He has shown strength with his arm and lifted up the lowly'.
Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for the family lives of the nation, upon which so much depends. We know that good experience of family life leads to good family life in the next generation. Be among us to bless, guide and keep us safe these special units of love, patience and forgiveness. And

continue to teach us the way of Jesus, who knew the security of a loving home with Mary and Joseph in Nazareth.

So may we all come to say with Mary,
'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour'.

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

Receive our prayers and bless our best efforts, which we offer in Jesus' name.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Collect for Mothering 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. **Amen**

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.**

Blessing

Praise God who loves us.

Praise God who cares.

May God, who gave birth to all creation, bless us:

may God, who became incarnate by an earthly mother, bless us:

may God, who broods as a mother over her children, bless us.

May almighty God bless us, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
now and forever. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. Amen