

Sunday March 19th 2023
Mothering Sunday
A service of worship for use at home
Prepared by Rev Alan Hargrave

This act of worship has been prepared for you to use at home, either on your own or with people close to you. Although you may be worshipping alone, remember that you are connected to many millions of others across the world who will be worshipping God this morning, praying for each other, and seeking God's help for ourselves and for God's world. You may like to sing or simply read the songs or, if you are following this on a laptop or tablet, play them by clicking on the [links](#).

Beginning our Worship

Let us still our hearts as we come before God. Pray this prayer slowly, pausing after each line.

Be still, Be silent, Alone
Empty Before your God
Say nothing.
Be still, Be silent
Let your God look on you.
Let God love you

Silence

"As a mother comforts her child, so shall I myself comfort you" says the Lord. (*Isaiah 66:13*)

We come to you this day, O God, whatever our situation. We thank you for the gift of life. And thank you that, whatever our situation today, whether we are on our own or with family and friends, YOU are with us. Amen.

Song This is the day that the Lord has made <https://youtu.be/TXZwW0D2OZ4>

This is the day, this is the day,
That the Lord has made
That the Lord has made.
We will rejoice, we will rejoice
and be glad in it
and be glad in it.

This is the day that the Lord has made
We will rejoice and be glad in it
This is the day, this is the day,
that the Lord has made

Introduction.

Today is **Mothers' Day** or, more correctly, **Mothering Sunday**. Traditionally it was a day when people in service were given a day off to go home and see their parents and also a chance to worship in their 'Mother Church'. It is advertised today as a wonderful family event. But for many people its is not like that at all. Indeed, 'motherhood' throughout history is not always a happy topic, as we shall see from our Bible readings.

Readings: Exodus 2:1-10

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. When 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. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him. Pharaoh's daughter 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. When 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. Then 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?" Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So, the girl went and called the child's mother.

Pharaoh'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. When 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

The child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then 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 so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own heart also.'

Matthew 12:46-50

While Jesus was speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers were standing outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, "Look, your mother and your brothers are wanting to speak to you." But Jesus replied, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

John 19:25-27

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

For the Word of the Lord **Thanks be to God.**

Reflection

These are just a few of the Bible readings that depict 'motherhood' as far from easy or straightforward. If you find Mothers' Day difficult, you are not alone. It may arouse painful memories of a childhood with a difficult or absent mother, or maybe a mum who died when you were young. It may remind you of your longing for a child you lost or were never able to have. No wonder some people try to avoid Mothers' Day completely!

Mothers, fathers, children and families, down the centuries, have known huge pain & hardship. Moses was the lucky one, found by Pharaoh's daughter and returned, for a time, to his mum's care - unlike most of the other baby boys who were killed. And this event is repeated in Jesus' time as his parents flee with him to Egypt, while all the baby boys in Bethlehem are slaughtered by Herod's troops.

In the past couple of years, we've often been unable to meet with our families because of Covid. But just imagine former times, when the plague swept through Europe, when there were no intensive care beds, no ventilators, no hope of a vaccine. Fear, anxiety, illness, death – these things are always with us. They are part of normal life in a fallen world. Simeon says to Mary, for whom being Jesus' mum was no bed of roses: 'A sword shall pierce your own heart also.' But in all of this, God **is** with us, just as he was with Mary, despite her anguish and pain.

In our third reading from Matthew's gospel, Jesus' mum arrives to see him. We might imagine Jesus rushing out to give her a hug and welcome her in. But no! Instead, he seems to give her a rather harsh put-down. However, he is also making a serious point. He asks: 'Who are my mother, my father, my sisters, my brothers?' It is a question many of us may have asked ourselves through Covid, or through other difficulties that life has thrown at us. Who are the people who have been a

mother, a father, a sister, a brother, a son, a daughter, to me? And it is not always our immediate family. After my dad died, my mum rapidly deteriorated with dementia. But we lived 200 miles away and my brother lives in Germany. We travelled up to see her most weekends but the person who really cared for her, sorted her medication, cooked for her, did her shopping, went in to see her 3, 4 - sometimes 5 - times a day was her next-door neighbour – the wonderful ‘Aunty Ruth’, a pillar of the local Methodist Church.

So, another important question is: who are the people who need **me**, or have needed **me**, to be to them a son, a daughter, a brother, a sister, a father, a mother? Who are the people who feel intensely isolated and alone? Who are the ones who can't get the supplies they need? Who is struggling to make ends meet or pay the rent? What about people coming to the UK from Ukraine, Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, to escape persecution, who desperately need my help? Who might I phone or even visit? What refugee charity might I donate to? If ever there was a time for loving our neighbours, then surely, that time is now!

And we see this in our final reading, as Jesus hangs in agony on the cross. He asks John to look after his mum – and asks his mum to keep an eye on John, too. I wonder, who can you be or have been a mother to? A father to? A sister to? A brother to?

One of the wonderful things about Church is that we are not individuals. We are a community – or rather many different, connected communities - across our circuit, across our city, across the UK and across the world. And, as a community, we have a great opportunity to welcome those who do not have a mother or father or son or daughter in their lives. To be those people for one another. If motherhood is an image of caring, then that is exactly the image we as a church should be portraying. And, maybe, it is exactly the image we are portraying?

About 4 years ago a young couple came to the UK seeking asylum after they had become Christians. They were unable to return to their native land, where to convert to another religion is a capital offence. They have no family here and have just had a baby. However, they do now have brothers and sisters and parents who care for them, love them and help them through their many trials. They are unable to see their own families, but they have become part of our family. And that has not just been a blessing for them. It has been an incredible blessing to all of us who have become their brothers and sisters and parents. Loving and caring is not one way traffic. Love is not a limited commodity. As it is expressed, unselfishly, it grows and expands. And everyone is blessed. And the world is a better place.

Song When I needed a neighbour were you there? https://youtu.be/quBKGeg8_hw

When I needed a neighbour
Were you there, were you there?
When I needed a neighbour, were you there?

*And the creed and the colour
And the name won't matter
Were you there?*

I was hungry and thirsty
Were you there, were you there?
I was hungry and thirsty, were you there?
And the creed...

I was cold, I was naked
Were you there, were you there?
I was cold, I was naked, were you there?
And the creed...

When I needed a shelter
Were you there, were you there?
When I needed a shelter were you there?
And the creed...

When I needed a healer
Were you there, were you there?
When I needed a healer, were you there?
And the creed...

Wherever you travel
I'll be there, I'll be there
Wherever you travel, I'll be there
*And the creed and the colour
And the name won't matter
I'll be there.*

Prayers

Let us first thank God for all that gives us cause for rejoicing and celebration today. For our parents, our children and all who are, or have been, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers or children to us. Hold them now in our hearts and thank God for them.

For those we love and those who love us, Lord, we give you thanks and praise

Let us also thank God for those to whom **we** have been mother, father, brother or sister: the people who look to **us** for support, kindness, compassion and love. Let us hold them in our hearts before God now.

For all we have given and all we have received, Lord, we give you thanks and praise

We hold in our hearts before God those for whom today is a painful reminder of difficult relationships, of unfulfilled longing for children, of untimely death of mother or child. All whose experience is very different from the 'perfect' family circle portrayed in the adverts.

For all who experience mothers' day as painful and difficult, Lord, hear our prayer

We hold in our hearts all those who are far from their own families and loved ones. Those who have escaped war, poverty or persecution to wait desperately on Normandy beaches for a flimsy, overcrowded, inflatable boat. Those who await the outcome of their asylum applications. Those whose daily life is uncertainty, disorientation and fear.

For all who have left home and family only to face fear, danger, exploitation and isolation, Lord, hear our prayer

We pray for those **we** know who are troubled, struggling with life or seriously ill. Let us name them in our hearts before God now.

Give peace, courage and hope to all who struggle with life, and grant them the joy of your salvation. Lord, hear our prayer.

And let us conclude our prayers, saying, together with all God's people:

**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
and forgive us our sins,
As we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and forever.
Amen.**

Hymn We sing our final hymn. The video of this song was recorded during Covid and reminds us that church is not just a building. There are many creative ways in which we can be family for one another, even if we are mostly 'home alone' https://youtu.be/xzTXI_jA-XQ

Sing of the Lord's goodness,
Father of all wisdom,
come to him and bless his name.
Mercy he has shown us,
his love is forever,
faithful to the end of days.

*Come then, all you nations,
sing of your Lord's goodness,
melodies of praise and thanks to God.
Ring out the Lord's glory,
praise him with your music,
worship him and bless his name.*

Power he has wielded,
honour is his garment,
risen from the snares of death.
His word he has spoken,
one bread he has broken,
new life he now gives to all.
Come then....

Courage in our darkness,
comfort in our sorrow,
Spirit of our God most high;
solace for the weary,
pardon for the sinner,
splendour of the living God.
Come then....

Praise him with your singing,
praise him with the trumpet,
praise God with the lute and harp;
praise him with the cymbals,
praise him with your dancing
praise God till the end of days.
Come then....

Blessing

Jesus said: 'Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives, do I give it to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. I have said this to you so that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have troubles, but do not be afraid, I have overcome the world.'

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. And the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be among us and remain with us, now and always. **Amen.**

Let us go forward together with hope, courage, generosity and love
In the name of Christ, Amen.

Alan Hargrave, Mothering Sunday 2023