

**Morning Worship Service
Sunday 14th March 2021
Lent 4 - Mothering Sunday**

Introduction

We have come to the city of the living God,
to the heavenly Jerusalem,
with thousands of angels in joyful assembly.

Alleluia

We have come to God the judge of all,
to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant.

Alleluia

SONG

Together we pray:

Lord, direct our thoughts,
teach us to pray,
lift up our hearts to worship you
in Spirit and in truth,
through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Confession

The grace of God has dawned upon the world with healing for all.
Though we have grieved him, yet he will heal us if we confess our sins in penitence
and faith.

Together we confess our sins to Almighty God:

God our Father, we come to you in sorrow for our sins:
For turning away from you and ignoring your will for our lives:
For behaving just as we wish, without thinking of you:
For failing you by what we do, think and say:
For letting ourselves be drawn away from you by temptations in the world around us:
For living as if we were ashamed to belong to your Son:
Father, forgive us, save us and help us. Amen.

Absolution

May God who is both power and love,
Forgive us and free us from our sins,
Heal and strengthen us by his Spirit,
And raise us to new life in Christ our Lord. Amen.

Collect

Reading

John 19: 25-27

Jesus' mother stood near his cross. So did his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. Jesus saw his mother there. He also saw the disciple he loved standing nearby. Jesus said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son." He said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, the disciple took her into his home.

Sermon

It's Mothering Sunday today and, whether we like it or not, it is a fact that everyone has a mother – or, if you're like me, had a mother, because mine died over 20 years ago!

It's also a fact that not all people have, or have had, mothers who have been good to them. In fact, for some, their experience of a mother is of someone who is deliberately cruel, unkind, and uncaring: maybe someone who exploits them for their own gain and profit. The mother in their life has been a painful experience, not one of love and nurture.

Others have never known their birth mothers for a variety of reasons: perhaps they died giving birth, or their mothers abandoned them. Often the neglect of some mothers to nurture their children is because they were never shown any love by their own mothers: so, they just continue to do the same as was done to them, not really being encouraged or shown how to do things differently.

So, should we abolish Mothering Sunday because of the bad memories and sorrow it can evoke for such people? Would that be the right thing to do?

Of course, as Christians, we don't want to stir up longing and heartache for something some people longed for but never had. But it's also a fact that many other people have enjoyed good relationships with their mothers. They have been loved and nurtured by them and encouraged by them to excel in life.

I don't think it's such a bad idea that a day a year is set aside to celebrate that - even though some won't enjoy the day because it highlights the fact that their loving mother is gone and the 'missing them' comes sharply into focus all over again. Everyone will have their own views on the rightness or wrongness of Mothering Sunday. But, what does God say on the matter of mothers?

Well if we look right back in Genesis, when God created all things, we can see that he took loving care in his creation. He said that 'it was good'; and after he had created man and woman, he looked at everything he had made and said that it was very good. He loved it all; and, when he had finished, he blessed the man and woman and told them to do the same.

God's plan, his desire, his blueprint for living if you like, is that we care for and look after each other and this beautiful planet he gave us as our home. Nowhere does it say that God gave us permission to use others, and the earth, for our own ends, our own

profit, our own gratification. It follows therefore, that he would want mothers to nurture their children as he would: to care and love them as he does.

Move on to the next book in the Bible and we come to Exodus where the ten commandments can be found. God gave the commandments to help us all live the best life possible – not because he's an overbearing tyrant; even though they may give that impression because most of the commandments say 'you shall not': but right in the middle is one telling us to honour our father and mother – and it's the only one with a specific blessing attached to it – 'that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you!'

Is it easy to honour a mother who's neglected or abused you your whole life? No! Of course it isn't! Just like it isn't easy to forgive them for what they've done – but that's exactly what God is telling us to do: honour and forgive them! Boy! Following Jesus is exceedingly hard sometimes!

My mother wasn't a Christian. Nor was she the mother I would have liked: but she did her best, especially as her own mother wasn't a good role model for her to learn from. In fact, when God made clear to me that, given how her own mother was, she did a pretty good job with me I could forgive lots. Just as I hope my children will forgive me. I became a Christian when they were both very young and had to learn to nurture them God's way and not my mother's way. I made lots of mistakes, some of which I've struggled to forgive myself for (which is a necessary process as well) but, with God's help, I've tried to do my best.....and sometimes I've even done good!

So, today is about honouring, and, yes, may be forgiving our mothers. However, it should definitely not be a day in isolation!

Our reading for today reveals Jesus on the very cusp of death; nailed to a cross; suffering the most unimaginable physical pain; knowing that once he died he would enter a spiritual void of being cut off from being part of the Triune God for the first time in all eternity. And his mother and the beloved disciple John are both there watching him suffer. Earlier, in Matthew 12 we read of Jesus' mother and brothers wanting to speak to him while he was talking to the crowd. Jesus' response seems strange, and even perhaps dismissive, when he says that basically anyone who is obedient to his Father in heaven is his mother, brother, sister.

However, in this comment, he is in no way disregarding his earthly mother but, instead paving the way for a new community of believers – the universal church – our spiritual family. There was no disregard for his mother because even while dying in agony on the cross he was so concerned for her future well-being that he instructed his friend John to care for her. Why didn't he ask his brothers to do this job?

Well, where were they? Not at the cross to support Mary in her grief – it was John doing that.

In God's eyes our mothers are meant to be a precious gift from him, and we should value and care for them under all circumstances; and all the time not just on one specified day a year. That can be so very hard to do when our mothers have been neglectful: and hard to do also if we are estranged from them. So, what's the answer?

Well, if we have a good relationship with our mothers, we should be thanking them and finding little ways to show them our love every day: but also, we should be thanking and praising God for blessing us with such a wonderful gift. Conversely, if, for whatever reason, the relationship with our mothers has broken down and we have done all we can to mend it but to no avail, then we can still thank God that through them he gave us life; and then allow God to fill the gap with his love where our mother's love is missing.

Because we've messed up the perfect world God created for us there will be damaged relationships in our lives – sadly including with our mothers. If that's the case for any of us, then let's give God permission to pour his holy love for us into that space that should have been filled by our mums.

But if you have / had a great mum.....rejoice and praise God. She is from him.

Creed

**We believe and trust in God the Father,
who made all things.**

**We believe and trust in his Son Jesus Christ,
who redeemed the world.**

**We believe and trust in his Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God.**

This is the faith of the Church.

This is our faith.

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

Intercessions

Intercessions for Lent 4 - Mothering Sunday 2021

Heavenly Father, we pray for all mothers today:

- ✚ For those who have cared for their children irrespective of receiving love in return
- ✚ For those who have watched their children die before them
- ✚ For those who haven't got enough funds to give their children the basic needs of life
- ✚ For those whose children are estranged
- ✚ For those who live in poorer countries who never see their children grow up healthily due to famine or war
- ✚ For those who have the blessing of good relations with their children

For all mothers we ask, Father, that you will bless and guide them in nurturing their children; comfort them in any distress; give them strength to administer Godly discipline; and fill them to overflowing with your love for the children you have gifted them with.

Heavenly Father, we pray for our Queen Elizabeth. We thank you for her faithful, devoted service to this country: and we ask you to minister to her in this time of turmoil and conflict within her family. May her faith in you uphold and sustain her as she deals with any hurt she may be feeling in the wake of the events of this week. Like all mothers and grandmothers, she has made mistakes – may she know the fulness of your forgiveness and the peace which only you can give. Above all may she know your presence with her and your blessing upon her.

Heavenly Father, we ask you to refresh and bless our community. As we begin to open up more in the days ahead may we all have a greater appreciation and consideration for others who live here. We ask you to transform the often aggressive and abrasive behaviour of some into a more gracious attitude showing a regard for, and giving value to, both those they know and the stranger.

We thank you for everyone who works to make our environment a better place: and may we realise our responsibility to reach out to others with love and compassion, as well as even sometimes turning the other cheek.

Heavenly Father, in times of plenty and need, you cradle our lives in your hands. We entrust to your care now all who are in any kind of need, especially the need for your healing.....Encircle them with your love and keep them ever within your tender mercy.

Let us continue in prayer saying together the words our Saviour taught us:

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 for ever. Amen.

SONG

Blessing

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. Amen.