

Thatcham URC – Worshipping Together (Gathered and Separate)

A Short Reflective Service

Sunday – 27th March 2022, 10.30am

Welcome to our Reflective Service today, here at church, online or read at home. It's good to be together again to worship and have fellowship. Today is the Fourth Sunday of Lent, and Mothering Sunday.

Opening prayer We open our hearts before you, faithful God, bringing those we love, and those we struggle to love, those we have lost, and those we are afraid of losing. We bring our tears and our joy, our disappointments and our hopes. We bring all that we carry and all that we long to lay down – in Jesus' name. **Amen**

Call to worship Psalm 71 vs 5-8

You have been my hope, My God and King, my source of confidence since my youth. From birth I have relied on you; Since you brought me out of my mother's womb. I will praise you forever. You are my secure support. My mouth overflows with your praise, Singing of your splendour all day long.

Hymn MP307

I will enter His gates with thanksgiving in my heart;
I will enter His courts with praise.
I will say this is the day that the Lord has made.
I will rejoice for He has made me glad.
He has made me glad, He has made me glad,
I will rejoice for He has made me glad.
He has made me glad, He has made me glad,
I will rejoice for He has made me glad

A prayer for parents

We give you thanks, heavenly Father, for the many ways in which you care for us. Lord Jesus, thank you for everyone who looks after children, especially Mums on this special Mothering Sunday. Thank you, for our families – for dads and brothers and sisters, for grandmas and granddads and uncles and aunties, for foster carers and step parents. Thank you for special friends and neighbours, childminders, nursery workers and school staff who all share in caring for children. Thank you that you love and care for us even before we are born and that we can discover your love through the people around us. Thank you for the many people who look after us. We pray now for your blessing upon parents, especially those known to us in this church and neighbourhood. Help them to be wise, strong and patient. Give them insight into their children's needs. Help them to be good examples of discipline, love and faith. May their homes be places of laughter and fun where children feel happy and safe.

Amen.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name; thy Kingdom come, thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. **Amen**

Our Father God in heaven
On whom our world depends,
To you let praise be given
For families and friends;
For parents, sisters, brothers,
A home where love belongs,
But on this day for mothers
We bring our thankful songs.

What wealth of God's bestowing
For all the world to share!
What strength of heart outgoing
To children everywhere!
Our deepest joys and sorrows
A mother's path must trace,
And earth's unknown tomorrows
Are held in her embrace.

How well we know the story
That tells of Jesus' birth,
The Lord of heaven's glory
become a child of earth;
A helpless infant sleeping,
yet King of realms above,
who finds in Mary's keeping
the warmth of human love.

Our Father God in heaven,
To you we lift our prayer,
That every child be given
Such tenderness and care,
Where life is all for others,
Where love your love displays:
For God's good gift of mothers
Let earth unite in praise!

Mothering Sunday is traditionally a day when we give thanks for our mothers and show them our appreciation. Falling as it does on Refreshment Sunday, when the fast of Lent is lifted briefly, it stands out as a day of joy and celebration in a season of austerity. In this context, the gospel reading for today, with its prophecy of suffering to come for both Jesus and his mother, seems both harsh and out of place. Mothers, though, may think differently! The experience of bearing and bringing up children is not all sweetness and light. It involves mental as well as physical pain. There is a cost to caring which this gospel highlights.

New testament reading Luke 2:25-35

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: 'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.'

The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: 'This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

Although Mary's appearances in the gospels are relatively few, they are sufficient to show us that her life was far from easy. Matthew suggests that her pregnancy was a source of embarrassment and potential disgrace from which Joseph planned to shield her by 'dismissing her quietly.' Following the birth, Matthew also tells of the threat to the child's life and the flight into Egypt. In Luke's gospel, we read Simeon's prophecy of conflict and suffering.

Later, when the family visits Jerusalem for the Passover, the twelve-year-old Jesus stays behind to talk with the teachers in the temple. Mary is hurt by the apparent thoughtlessness with which he treats his parents, and also bewildered by his reference to the temple as his 'Father's house'. When he embarks on his ministry, he appears to turn his back on his family, refusing to see his mother and brothers when they come looking for him. He consistently teaches the priority of discipleship over family ties. Not surprisingly, hurt and bewilderment re-surface: at one point they think he is out of his mind. Whatever her trials, though, Mary remains loyal to her son. John identifies her specifically as being among the women who were standing near the foot of the cross. This can be seen as the fulfilment of Simeon's words, the sword piercing Mary's heart as she sees her son die the horrific death of a criminal.

Most mothers (and any involved in caring for others) will be able to identify with at least some of Mary's experiences.

Across the world, women and children are particularly vulnerable in situations of war or conflict. Only in the last few weeks we have seen mothers from Ukraine handing their children over to strangers before returning to support their countrymen in the war. Others leaving with their children, leaving husbands and homes seeking refuge in other countries.

Even in homes where tragedy is unknown, children take steps of independence as they grow up, leaving parents anxious and bereft. They embark on projects which take them away from home. They take on jobs that do not fill their parents dreams of lucrative careers in the City or at the Bar. They embrace new values and enter into relationships which parents neither understand nor approve.

If pain and grief are inevitably part of motherhood, is Mothering Sunday really about 'bad news'? Paul draws on his own experience of suffering to assert that the other side of 'affliction' is the 'consolation' that comes from God. Perhaps Mary glimpsed something of this when Jesus spoke to her from the cross, concerned for her in spite of his own pain, and placing her in the care of John. She is not abandoned in her grief, and the mutual love of mother and son is not destroyed by suffering. Certainly she must have realised it later, when the empty tomb showed her son's death in a completely new light.

Just as Mary continued to support her son through all the challenges, we as Christians know that God our Father supports us. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians, 'We know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.'

Hymn Do not be afraid R&S 591

**Do not be afraid for I have redeemed you
I have called you by your name - you are mine**

When the fear of loneliness is looming
then remember I am at your side.

When you walk through the waters I'll be with you
You will never sink beneath the waves.

When you dwell in the shelter of the stranger
remember you are precious in my eyes

When the fire is burning all around you
You will never be consumed by the flames.

You are mine, O my child, I am your Father
and I love you with a perfect love.

The following prayer is based around moments from the life of Mary

Lord God, you chose Mary to be mother to your Son and she trusted in you. We pray for mothers and those who care like mothers that they will trust in the power of the Most High and discover the miracle of new life from within. Loving God, **for a mother's love, we thank you.**

Lord God, you declared through Elizabeth that Mary was blessed among women because she believed the promise you made to her. We pray for mothers and those who care like mothers, that they will hold onto your promises and pass those promises on to their children. Loving God, **for a mother's love, we thank you.**

Lord God, you inspired Mary to sing of the great things that you had done for her because you lifted her up from nothing. We pray for mothers and those who care like mothers, especially when they feel they cannot cope or are near to giving up. Bless them with inspiration and strength to fulfil the high calling of caring for children. Loving God, **for a mother's love, we thank you.**

Lord God, You warned Mary through Simeon of the pain of being a mother and how hard it would be to let go and share in his sorrow. We pray for mothers and those who care like mothers, especially those who face the sadness of seeing their children hurt or in danger. Give them grace to bear the sword that pierces through their soul. Loving God, **for a mother's love and her costly care, we thank you.**

Lord God, you were with Mary as she saw your Son grow up and he began to welcome others as mother, sister and brother. Increasingly she let go of Jesus to fulfil the hour that was to come. Help all those who are mothers and those who care like mothers to let go of their children and trust them to the embrace and care of others and, most of all, to your eternal purposes. Loving God, **for a mother's love, we thank you.**

Lord God, your Son remembered Mary even as he was dying on a cross and he trusted her to John's care and protection. Help all mothers and those who care like mothers to face bereavement and deep sadness. May they know your words of comfort and the help of friends. Loving God, **for a mother's love, we thank you.**

Thank you, Lord, that Mary's life shows what it means to be blessed as a parent. It was not a life free from sorrow but a life held safe in the palm of your hand. Help all those who are mothers and those who care like mothers to trust that whatever happens you hold beneath them arms that will catch them if they fall, and keep them safe. Loving God, **for a mother's love we thank you. Amen**

A prayer for Ukraine

Gracious God, we pray that your reconciling love may bring harmony to our world. We pray for those caught up in conflicts between nations and states; for all who live in fear. May the leaders of the nations listen to each other, and commit themselves to peace. **Amen**

Mothering Sunday is a chance to say 'thank you' for the special role of our mothers. Even mums who are far away or who have died can be remembered and honoured. As is the tradition we distribute flowers to celebrate mothers. We ask God to bless these flowers and to fill the hearts of those who receive them with His love. Please collect some flowers as you leave the church today.

Though parenthood brings its challenges it also brings great joy As the children in our lives us bring us joy may our lives on earth bring joy to God the Father, by our words, our actions and our deeds.

Let sing and celebrate the God who loved us and gave us life

Hymn Come on and celebrate MP 99

Come on and celebrate His gift of love,
We will celebrate
The Son of God who loved us
And gave us life.

We'll shout Your praise, O King,
You give us joy nothing else can bring,

We'll give to You our offering
In celebration praise.

Come on and celebrate, celebrate
Celebrate and sing;
Celebrate and sing to the King.

Going out prayer and blessing

God our Father, Thank you that we cannot fall out of your love. As you welcome us with ever open arms, enlarge our hearts and minds, to serve faithfully and to love and praise you. **Amen.**

May the strength of God sustain us; may the power of God preserve us; may the hands of God protect us; may the way of God direct us; may the love of God go with us this day and forever. **Amen.**