

19th March 2023 – Morning Service

Mothering Sunday

Andy Haynes

Call to Worship - Psalm 131:2

I have calmed and quietened myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child I am content.

A suitable Psalm for celebrating Mothers today. Our first hymn speaks of God being like a mother, when it says 'then to thy need, He like a mother doth speed'.

StF 88 – Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

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| 1) Praise to the Lord, the Almighty,
the King of creation!
O my soul, praise him, for he is thy health
and salvation!
All ye who hear,
Brothers and sisters, draw near,
Praise him in glad adoration. | 4) Praise to the Lord, who, when darkness of sin
is abounding,
Who, when the godless do triumph,
all virtue confounding,
Sheddeth his light,
Chaseth the horrors of night,
Saints with his mercy surrounding. |
| 2) Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work
and defend thee;
Surely his goodness and mercy here daily
attend thee:
Ponder anew
What the Almighty can do,
Who with his love doth befriend thee. | 5) Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me
adore him!
All that hath life and breath, come now with
praises before him!
Let the amen
Sound from his people again:
Gladly for aye we adore him. |
| 3) Praise to the Lord, who doth nourish thy life
and restore thee,
Fitting thee well for the tasks that are ever
before thee,
Then to thy need
He like a mother doth speed,
Spreading the wings of grace o'er thee. | |

Joachim Neander; translated by Catherine Winkworth & Rupert E Davies

Prayer of Adoration

Creator of all, Sustainer of all, your glory and majesty are beyond our understanding, your power too awesome to behold. We bless your holy name. We remind ourselves of the words found in Isaiah 66 where you state that heaven is your throne and earth your footstool, for by your mighty hand all things were made, all came into being at your command. So great is the God that we worship this day. And we marvel that you tell us that 'As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you'. So may we come before you this morning with lowly contrite hearts, ready to worship and praise you for each blessing you bring us. For the outpouring of your love each and every day, we offer you our thanks and adoration.

Thank you that in our quiet time of worship we can make space for you, putting aside the uncertainties of this world, and resting instead upon the certainties of the Kingdom, for your promises are not changeable but immovable and eternal.

O God Your love reaches to the highest heavens, your righteousness stands like the tallest mountain, your justice is deeper than any ocean, your grace flows like a never-ending river. How can we not proclaim your majesty from generation to generation? For you are omnipotent, omnipresent, immortal, invisible, almighty and everlasting; and yet Lord you care for each and every one of us, unworthy as we are.

And so dear God this morning, we remember on this 4th Sunday in Lent, that your love for us led to the wonderful gift of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ whom you sent to our lost world that we sinners might be saved. That love took Him on that awful road to Calvary, where he suffered and died to pay the price of our sin, that all those who repent and believe, might stand before you with no fear of condemnation. As Charles Wesley puts it in that great hymn 'Amazing love! How can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?' And in giving thanks we now say the prayer that Jesus Himself taught his disciples:-

The Lord's Prayer

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 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. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

Isaiah 49 reminds us that God's love is greater than a mother's, when in verse 15 we read "*Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you*" says the Lord. Our next hymn reminds us of that love, our love for Him being weak and faint in comparison.

StF 426 – Hark, my soul! It is the Lord

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| 1) Hark, my soul! It is the Lord;
'Tis thy Saviour, hear his word;
Jesus speaks, and speaks to thee:
'Say, poor sinner, lov'st thou me? | 4) Mine is an unchanging love,
Higher than the heights above,
Deeper than the depths beneath,
Free and faithful, strong as death. |
| 2) I delivered thee when bound,
And, when bleeding, healed thy wound;
Sought thee wandering, set thee right,
Turned thy darkness into light. | 5) Thou shalt see my glory soon,
When the work of grace is done;
Partner of my throne shalt be;
Say, poor sinner, lov'st thou me?' |
| 3) Can a woman's tender care
Cease toward the child she bare?
Yes, she may forgetful be,
Yet will I remember thee. | 6) Lord, it is my chief complaint
That my love is weak and faint;
Yet I love thee, and adore;
O for grace to love thee more! |

William Cowper

Reading: Exodus 2:1 – 10

Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the river-bank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. 'This is one of the Hebrew babies,' she said. Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?' 'Yes, go,' she answered. So the girl went and got the baby's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.' So the woman took the baby and nursed him. When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, 'I drew him out of the water.'

StF 443 – Come let us sing of a wonderful love

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| <p>1) Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,
Tender and true;
Out of the heart of the Father above,
Streaming to me and to you:
Wonderful love
Dwells in the heart of the Father above.</p> <p>2) Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,
Joyfully came;
Came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,
Sharing their sorrow and shame;
Seeking the lost,
Saving, redeeming at measureless cost.</p> | <p>3) Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;
Why do they roam?
Love only waits to forgive and forget;
Home, weary wanderer, home!
Wonderful love
Dwells in the heart of the Father above.</p> <p>4) Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love,
Come and abide,
Lifting my life, till it rises above
Envy and falsehood and pride,
Seeking to be
Lowly and humble, a learner of thee.</p> |
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Robert Walmsley

Sermon

So, we've just sung about a wonderful love. But I wonder what you think about our set reading for today? Was a wonderful love displayed here, by a mother who left her baby in a wicker basket floating amongst the reeds of the Nile? Well I suppose the least we can do on this Mothering Sunday is look a bit closer at the circumstances surrounding this story.

It all began with Joseph being thrown in the pit by his jealous brothers who then sold him for slavery, where he ended up in Egypt. A famine broke out in all the land, but Joseph being led by God through his dreams, had become powerful in Egypt, and had storehouses full of grain in readiness. His own brothers came for help not knowing who he was, and eventually Joseph was able and willing to help his family who then settled in Egypt. Generations later, the Hebrew people had multiplied to the point that the Egyptians felt threatened by their numbers. The order went out, that every new born Hebrew male should be killed. So now we've gathered a few more facts, this dangerous situation of floating your baby in a basket on the Nile was in order to protect him from Egyptian slaughter. It makes a bit more sense now doesn't it?

But it is even more astonishing what God manages to bring about through these unusual circumstances. For here was a mother who feared for the life of her child, who couldn't have imagined what God had planned for her son, and how he was to play such a key role in releasing God's own people from slavery. She had no idea whether he would survive when she gave him up for his own safety, but to then be paid to bring up her own son was a real twist in events. She couldn't have imagined anything like this would happen. And what better nurse could the child have had than his very own mother?

And it strikes me that we so often wonder where God is; in the world; in our nation; in our churches; in our own lives, in fact in every circumstance when we don't fully understand what's happening and have no idea where things are going to end up. There are so many situations that test our faith; that cause us to lose hope; that fill us full of fear.

But when all seemed hopeless for this poor mite, abandoned and alone, God comes to the rescue via the most extraordinary route, using the enemy to bring about mercy to this child who would have otherwise perished through hunger and neglect, if not by other means.

And so it is a most remarkable story which has many parallels and lessons for us this morning. But this is not only Mothering Sunday, but it is also the 4th Sunday of Lent. A time when we reflect on another stricken being. Whose parents had to flee for his safety following His birth, due to the king's order to murder all the boys of 2 years old or younger. A person, who had a mother chosen by God to care for Him as a little child, a person who was also tasked to release people from slavery, a person who through the enemy would end up bringing mercy to the nations so that no one need perish. And that person was Jesus.

That leads me to the Gospel reading for today, which is taken from Luke 2:27b – 35

"..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.'"

These words of Simeon were a prophetic praise to God, and we are told that the child's mother and father marvelled at what Simeon said about their baby Jesus. But after that, Simeon then made a dire prediction to Mary, that a sword would pierce her own soul. No mother wants to see their offspring suffer, not the mother of Moses, or Mary, the mother of Jesus. The Hebrew child was hidden in that basket in the waters of the Nile, the Pharaohs daughter who rescued the baby named him Moses – (Hebrew for 'draw out') because she drew him out of the water. Appropriately named, for Moses was to draw his people out of Egypt – out of slavery.

Jesus was drawn out of the waters of the Jordan as he was baptised prior to the beginning of His ministry and mission by which He was to draw people out of the bondage and slavery of sin. But as John 1 v 11 tells us *"He came unto His own and His own received Him not"*. For during this time of Lent we reflect on the Jesus who (as was prophesied by Isaiah – 53v3) was despised and rejected by those He came to save, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief – and we hid our faces from Him and esteemed Him not.

And nothing has changed. For just like the Israelites turned their back on God and grumbled and moaned at Moses, so did the Jews reject Jesus the Messiah sent by God, and so do people today use the Lord's name in vain; for we live in an age where society sees Jesus as no more than a convenient swear word! But as God shows such compassion towards his children, greater than any pure hearted Mother could towards her own offspring, then we need to reflect that same love of God as we seek every opportunity to bring light into the darkened world in which we live. We must never lose sight of the hope we have in Christ Jesus, who because of His great love for us put His own mother to suffering as she witnessed his horrific death on the cross (a sword will pierce your own soul - as Simeon put it). But He bore the suffering and shame of the cross so that He might take upon His own shoulders the sins of the world, that the world through him might be saved. That includes my sin – and your sin. For as the bible tells us, (Philippians 2 v 8) *He humbled himself by becoming obedient, even unto death.*

"Not my will, but thine be done" - Words of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, recorded for us in Luke 22 v 42

We reminded ourselves earlier, from the words in Isaiah, that God's love is greater than any mother's. Jesus too shows such care and compassion when towards His end days He ponders over the city of Jerusalem proclaiming *"..how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing"* (Matt 23 v 37). Wonderful imagery of being in the shadow of the wings of the one who cares for us today. There is another sermon in there!

But where do you stand this morning? Are you conscious of that love He has for you? Do you feel it and know it? Are you reassured by it? If so, have you responded to it, recognising Jesus for who He is, and giving your heart and soul to the one who gave His all for us? Lent is the perfect time to contemplate these things, and make a new commitment to the God who loves us so much, that He sent us His only Son. Amen.

Our next hymn by Charles Wesley touches on that imagery, the support and comfort we find in Christ, and speaks of the grace that covers all our sin

StF 355 – Jesus lover of my soul

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| 1) Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly,
While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high;
Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
Till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven guide,
O receive my soul at last! | 3) Thou, O Christ, art all I want;
More than all in thee I find;
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint,
Heal the sick, and lead the blind.
Just and holy is thy name,
I am all unrighteousness -
False and full of sin I am,
Thou art full of truth and grace |
| 2) Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on thee;
Leave, ah, leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me.
All my trust on thee is stayed,
All my help from thee I bring;
Cover my defenceless head
With the shadow of thy wing. | 4) Plenteous grace with thee is found,
Grace to cover all my sin;
Let the healing streams abound,
Make and keep me pure within.
Thou of life the fountain art;
Freely let me take of thee;
Spring thou up within my heart,
Rise to all eternity. |

Charles Wesley

Prayers of Intercession

Dear Lord God, on this Mothering Sunday we come before You to give thanks for all mums, their patience and understanding, their care and concern, their teaching, guidance, support and encouragement. We recognise that these qualities are not always easy to achieve, and that life's struggles and demands can get in the way, adding to the pressures of motherhood. So we ask that You be near them, uphold them in the task, and bless them along the way.

We pray for those mums, who now need the help of their children to assist them, due to age or illness; may they know Your presence whatever the circumstance. We pray for grieving mums, who have suffered loss or known disappointment and heartache. We pray for those who long to become mums but are unable to fulfil the role for whatever reason. We pray for mums who have the burden of bringing up children in poverty, in parts of the globe where supplying basic needs is a constant struggle, in life threatening situations where wars rage and hopes and dreams are shattered. We also think of the many refugees at this time, mums who have nowhere to go, who are vulnerable, lonely and fearful, and whose children lie exhausted and hungry. Be with them all we pray.

L: Lord in Your mercy **R: Hear our prayer.**

Dear Lord, we thank You for the gift of family and friends. We praise You for each blessing and comfort they bring to us, each happy memory and treasured moment. Help us to be grateful for times shared and heart-warming words spoken, and let us never take peoples kindness for granted, but help us to give as freely as You have given to us, that we may love one another as you have loved us.

L: Lord in Your mercy **R: Hear our prayer.**

Loving God, this morning we continue to pray for the people of Ukraine, and all the countries of the world ravaged by war. Give to our world and its peoples the peace that comes from above, that they may find Christ's way of freedom and life. Lord God we pray now for all the nations of the world, including our own. We ask that governments, leaders and all who hold positions of authority will be moved to seek justice and peace and to serve those they lead with integrity and care.

We pray, as always, for persecuted Christians around the globe, who are courageous in their faith, standing firm in their beliefs and often suffering great hardship as a result. We ask that you draw very near to them in their times of trouble, and bring them peace.

L: Lord in Your mercy **R: Hear our prayer.**

We pray for our churches, our ministers, and our communities. Assist all those who work in the circuit to keep our churches operating. We pray for our own church and for all the activities that take place here each week. We now bring before you those in need of prayer, knowing that you are aware of circumstances as we utter their namesAnd so we ask that they will know your presence with them in their hour of need, that you will strengthen and sustain them, and that your healing hand may be upon them – all this we ask in and through the precious name of Jesus.

L: Lord in Your mercy **R: Hear our prayer. Amen.**

Our last hymn is one of grace and mercy, a great hymn for Lent.

StF 494 – Come thou fount of every blessing

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| 1) Come, thou fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing thy grace;
Streams of mercy never ceasing
Call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious measure
Sung by flaming tongues above;
O the vast, the boundless treasure
Of my Lord's unchanging love! | 3) O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be'.
Let that grace, Lord, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Take my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it from thy courts above! |
| 2) Here I find my greatest treasure:
'Hither by thy help I've come',
And I hope, by thy good pleasure,
Safely to arrive at home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger,
Interposed his precious blood. | |

Robert Robinson

The Grace

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all for evermore. **Amen**