

Bridge Court MHA – 14th March, 2021 – Mothering Sunday

Call to Worship: Psalm 33 verse 5

The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love. Amen.

We are here to worship God, to celebrate motherhood and remember the Church is like a good mother who helps us to grow in faith and love. Our opening hymn is Bishop Timothy Dudley Smith's version of the Magnificat, inspired by the 1961 "New English Bible". Number 186, 'Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!'

1. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!

Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;

Tender to me the promise of his word;

In God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

2. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!

Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;

His mercy sure, from age to age the same;

His holy name – the Lord, the Mighty One.

3. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!

Powers and dominions lay their glory by;

Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,

The hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

4. Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!

Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord

To children's children and for evermore!

© Timothy Dudley-Smith (1926 ---)

Let us come to our Lord in prayer.

Loving God, as our Saviour, Jesus told the people of Jerusalem, 'I long to gather you safely under my wings, as a mother hen gathers her chicks', we come to thank you for loving and protecting us, gathering us to yourself.

'As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you,' says the Lord. God of the universe, Author and Sustainer of all life, hear and accept our praise and worship, for you care for each one of us, providing our daily needs and guiding us; you reach out to everyone in love to comfort and strengthen us with unnumbered blessings.

Above all else, thank you, Lord for giving your only and Beloved Son, Christ Jesus, to be our Saviour, guide and friend, for through his death and resurrection you overcame the power of sin and death and draw us close to you as a loving parent holds a child to make him us feel safe and warm in your care. All glory, power and praise are yours by right and we worship you in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Let us set ourselves right with our Lord by confessing our sins. When I say, 'Lord, in you mercy,' please respond with 'Hear our prayer'.

Lord, on Mothering Sunday, we remember that a mother will often sacrifice her own needs for the sake of her children. Lord, for the times when our own needs have been more important to us than those of other people, we ask your forgiveness.

Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Like a mother, you give of your very self to nourish and sustain us. Lord, for the times we have ignored you and turned away, we ask your forgiveness.

Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Can a mother forget her own child? We are sorry for the times when we have forgotten you, O Lord, times when we have failed to share your love with our neighbours, especially to those in need or distress. We repent in the lovely name of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, trusting in your grace for our pardon.

Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Merciful God, you hear and answer all prayers and we believe that you have indeed forgiven us. Teach us to live as you wish, by following the perfect example of Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We shall say the prayer our Lord taught his disciples.

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.

We shall sing a hymn by Fred Kaan, a Dutchman who was appointed Moderator of the West Midlands Province of the United Reform Church in 1978. He occasionally worshipped at St. Phillip's Cathedral, Birmingham. Hymn number 119, 'God of Eve and God of Mary'.

**1. God of Eve and God of Mary,
God of love and mother-earth,
Thank you for the ones who with us
Shared their life and gave us birth.**

**2. As you came to earth in Jesus,
So you come to us today;
You are present in the caring
That prepares us for life's way.**

**3. Thank you that the Church, our Mother,
Gives us bread and fills our cup,
And the comfort of the Spirit
Warms our hearts and lifts us up.**

**4. Thank you for belonging, shelter,
Bonds of friendship, ties of blood,
And for those who have no children,
Yet are parents under God.**

**5. God of Eve and God of Mary,
Christ our brother, human Son,
Spirit, caring like a Mother,
Take our love and make us one!**

© Fred Kaan (1929 – 2009)

The Old Testament reading is 1 Samuel chapter 1 verses 21 to 28

When the man Elkanah went up with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to the LORD and to fulfil his vow, Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, "After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the LORD, and he will live there always."

“Do what seems best to you,” Elkanah her husband told her. “Stay here until you have weaned him; only may the LORD make good his word.” So the woman stayed at home and nursed her son until she had weaned him.

After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh. When they had slaughtered the bull, they brought the boy to Eli, and she said to him,

“As surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD. I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD.” And he worshipped the LORD there. Amen.

Address 1

Three thousand years ago, an Israelite, Elkanah, had two wives, Peninnah and Hannah. However, whilst Peninnah had several children, Hannah was unable to conceive. It wasn't only being childless that upset Hannah, but how Peninnah tormented her about it, for Peninnah knew that Elkanah loved Hannah more than her and jealousy increased her spite.

Nowadays, being unable to have a child still causes great heartache, especially among women who have postponed having a family in favour of advancement in their career. However, three thousand years ago, childless women were thought of as cursed, or a disgrace to their husband, so like Hannah, they were often mocked by other women. Now, you should remember that Jews usually sway when they are praying and, in her distress, poor Hannah prayed so passionately for the Lord to remove her distress at the temple at Shiloh that its priest, Eli, thought she was drunk and told her off, until she assured him she was troubled in spirit, not by spirits! When Hannah explained why she was so sad, he added his prayer to hers as she left.

Imagine her joy when she conceived soon afterwards and gave birth to healthy baby boy, whom she named Samuel. Samuel means, ‘The Lord answered my prayer’. You'd have expected Hannah to keep Samuel close, to be cherished, if not spoilt, for she would be unlikely to have had another child. Instead, she recognised that Samuel was God's gift to her, so she offered him back as soon as boy was old enough to be independent of her. She took him to Eli at Shiloh and dedicated him to the Lord for all of his life. (Samuel was therefore a Nazarite – dedicated to the Lord by a sacred promise).

The first book of Samuel records how faithfully Samuel honoured his mother's promise and became vital figure in Jewish history, a blessing to the nation, by devoting the sacrificial love and faith he'd learned in infancy from Hannah to the Israelites. Amen.

Our next hymn was written by Alan Gaunt, a Mancunian URC minister, who served mainly in the North of England and whose last post was at Windermere in the Lake District. Hymn number 120, ‘We gladly celebrate and praise’.

**1. We gladly celebrate and praise,
The gift so great and good,
Through which God's kindness is made known:
The gift of motherhood.**

**2. We sing of Mary's mother-love:
For she, of all on earth,**

**Received the privilege to bear
And bring God's Son to birth.**

**3. We pray that God's own mother-love
Will hold in gentleness,
All children who have never known
A mother's tenderness.**

**4. For mothers, who with broken hearts,
Are faced with grief and loss,
We pray the Son of God will give
Deep comfort from his cross.**

**5. We trust the mother-love of God,
Who bears, in Mary's boy,
Our pain and sorrow, to secure
Our everlasting joy.**

© Alan Gaunt (born 1935)

Our Gospel reading is Luke chapter 2 verses 22 to 35

When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

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 upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 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 now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to 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." Amen.

Address 2: 'Mary, Mother of Christ & Mother Church'

When the angel Gabriel gave Mary news that she would bear God's Son, she was betrothed to Joseph at the time, which means more than being engaged, for in First Century Judea girls of twelve and a half or over could legally cohabit when betrothed and it was so solemn a commitment that it needed a divorce to break it. Now this raised serious issues for Mary, as her pregnancy might have led to charges of infidelity levelled against her and adultery was punishable by death. Many young women would have been less than enthusiastic about such a case, but not Mary: she accepted Gabriel's explanation and simply replied, 'I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said.' In other words, she was prepared to take on the world, its finger-pointing, spiteful condemnation and possible death sentence to do God's will. What remarkable faith Mary

exhibited to trust God in such a venture: it is hardly surprising that her Son, Jesus, was obedient, even to death on a cross, trusting only in God's saving grace after he has been raised by such a mother.

Mary had a good grasp of the Scriptures, for the Magnificat, her hymn of praise, develops the song of Hannah after she conceived Samuel, from words of triumph over her enemies to Mary's praise for the goodness and grace of God towards the downtrodden and poor. As Jewish mothers had the responsibility for teaching their children the Scriptures, it is unsurprising that Jesus' understanding of the prophets' writing and Torah was superior to High Priests, Pharisees and Scribes. However, it was Mary's boundless faith in God and her compassion for others that clearly influenced Christ – God chose the right person to be his mother.

Mary and Joseph were devout but poor, for the birth narratives describe in some detail the straightened circumstances surrounding Christ's birth: homeless; in a shelter used by livestock that would have been cold, dark and smelly – even if the inn-keeper's wife had swept it out and put down fresh straw; unwelcomed by Joseph's family – perhaps because they disapproved of her pregnancy. Jesus Christ came to share the common lot, not to lord it over us, remote and superior.

Unlike some of the anti-heroines of our television soaps, Mary retained her faithfulness and integrity amid the troubled society in which she raised her children. It was her influence that developed the human side of Jesus – his outreach and trust in God the Father and, I suspect his praying, too. Despite Simeon's warning that 'a sword would pierce her soul', Mary was prepared to face anything for the Lord God – as was her Son, Jesus.

It was Mary who bade Jesus perform his first miracle, turning water into wine at a wedding feast at Cana, but she was amongst family members who urged Jesus to return home, believing him to be deranged at the start of his ministry. Despite these initial doubts, she followed him even to Calvary, where she had the fortitude to stand beneath the cross. She shared the joy of Jesus' resurrection and ascension and it is fair to surmise that she was among the hundred and twenty inflamed by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost when the Church, Mother Church, was born.

That is our challenge on Mothering Sunday, when we reflect upon Mary's maternal love and the love that Mother Church is commissioned to offer to all-comers, for we are called to be as faithful and caring Mary, to trust in God and to do his will in response for the love that flows from him – even if our service causes us grief at times.

May our lives and service reflect the exemplary qualities of the Holy Mother in today's reading and may our Church prove as steadfast as she was in witnessing to God's amazing love for everyone. Amen.

We continue our worship with hymn number 415, 'The Church of Christ, in every age', written in 1969 by Revd. Fred Pratt Green, and called "the Caring Church".

- 1. The Church of Christ, in every age,
Beset by change, but Spirit led,
Must claim and test its heritage
And keep on rising from the dead.**
- 2. Across the world, across the street,
The victims of injustice cry**

**For shelter and for bread to eat,
And never live until they die.**

**3. Then let the servant Church arise,
A caring Church that longs to be
A partner in Christ's sacrifice,
And clothed in Christ's humanity.**

**4. For he alone, whose blood was shed,
Can cure the fever in our blood
And teach us how to share our bread
And feed the starving multitude.**

**5. We have no mission but to serve
In full obedience to our Lord:
To care for all, without reserve,
And spread his liberating Word.**

© F. Pratt Green {1903 – 2000}

In our prayers of intercession, when I say, 'Lord, in your mercy', please respond, 'hear our prayer'. Let us pray.

Amazing God, we offer praise and thanksgiving for all your blessings: for everything we enjoy; for those opportunities and experiences that have fulfilled us, but most of all for loving us despite our failure to live as you call us to. Although we rejoice in this beautiful, wonderful planet on which we live and in your sustaining grace, we grieve at the suffering of our neighbours both nearby and further afield, often as a result of our failure to live as you call us to. Help us to play our part, however small it may be, to heal some of the brokenness that surrounds us. Lord, we know many situations are far beyond our powers to remedy, we know they are not beyond yours.

'Lord, in your mercy,' 'hear our prayer'.

Loving God, help us answer your call to serve you as a good mother tends to the needs of her children, when we consider the needs of the poor and vulnerable in our society. Remember the churches in our area and the World Church. Guide us through this pandemic and help us serve and support the poor and broken-hearted, here and abroad. May we find new ways, not only to preach Good News but to live it day by day and to be a light of hope in a gloomy, tumultuous world.

'Lord, in your mercy,' 'hear our prayer'.

Lord our Guide, encourage the Government and their advisors to adopt policies that will bring us safely through this pandemic whether or not they are popular or politically expedient. We continue to ask for a special blessing upon the NHS, scientists and keyworkers as they strive to heal us and to keep us safe throughout this crisis. Help them cope with the enormous demands that are being put upon them and protect them in their work.

'Lord, in your mercy,' 'hear our prayer'.

Gracious God, we pray that the leaders of the world will learn to walk the ways of peace and to negotiate and compromise instead of using force to gain their ends. May those who govern countries where people are persecuted for their beliefs, race or gender, turn and seek mercy and justice in all their dealings. We pray that the beauty of your shalom will overcome the hatred in human hearts.

'Lord, in your mercy,' 'hear our prayer'.

Lord of wholeness and wellbeing, we remember before you people in our family or the community who are suffering from sickness, grief or trouble, besides all who are living with a dementia and all who seek to help them. May they all receive good quality care and support, but may they also experience your holy presence in their time of need, so they experience healing, renewed strength and peace, despite the fraught times in which we are living.

Remember in your compassion everybody who is facing furlough, or unemployment, crippling loneliness, addictions, broken relationships and especially bereavement at a time when we are already burdened with grief and uncertainty. Help us to be sensitive to the needs of our neighbours, so we can offer them friendship and practical support. Loving Lord, enfold them all with the warmth of your love, so they may receive the fullness of your comfort, hope and all-transcending peace.

'Lord, in your mercy,' 'hear our prayer'.

God our Saviour, the past year has been a wilderness in which we have been sorely tested. Grant us the faith and courage to bear all that is asked of us until life returns to some kind of normality.

'Lord, in your mercy,' 'hear our prayer'.

Abba, Father God, bless us all and our friends and families. Keep us free from harm, help us to resist temptation to sin, so that the manner in which we live brings you honour and glory, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Amen.

Our closing hymn was written by Jan Struther, the nom de plume of Janet Anstruther. She was an acclaimed author whose best-known novel was made into the splendid wartime film, "Mrs. Miniver", starring Greer Garson and Walter Pidgeon. We shall sing number 526, 'Lord of all hopefulness'.

**1. Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,
Whose trust, ever childlike, no cares could destroy,
Be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,
Your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.**

**2. Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith.
Whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe,
Be there at our labours, and give us, we pray,
Your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.**

**3. Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
Your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,
Be there at our homing, and give us, we pray,
Your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.**

**4. Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
Whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,
Be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,
Your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.**

© Jan Struther {1901 - 1953}

Benediction

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