

30th March 2025 – Morning Service

Mothering Sunday

Jill Martin

Call to Worship - 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

Today we join together in worship to celebrate Mothering Sunday. I am aware for many people this is a very difficult celebration, those who feel pain because they never became mothers, those who feel pain because their own mother abandoned or abused them, those who feel the loss of their mother particularly difficult today. We are here to join in the worship of our God, who leads and guides us, hears and loves us as his children today and always.

Let's not confuse Mothering Sunday with the American Mother's Day which is held in May and is a day put aside to celebrate and remember our mothers, alive or dead. Mothering Sunday is always the 4th Sunday in Lent and it is a celebration of the love for the Mother Church and both boys and girls in service going home to spend the day with their mother, taking traditional gifts of flowers and sometimes sharing Simnel Cake.

Prayer of Approach

No matter how long you have wandered, **come, let us worship God here.**

No matter what you have done or not done, **come, let us worship God here.**

No matter how lost you might think you are, no matter how much you think you cannot be found, the mothering Spirit of God is here.

Come, let us worship God here, and return the embrace that has always been.

StF 186 – Tell out my soul

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| 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. | 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. |
| 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. | 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! |

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Prayer of Adoration

Holy and gracious God, creator of the world and giver of life we praise and bless your holy name.

You are the God who made us, you are the God who freed your people from slavery in Egypt, the God who fed them in the wilderness. And you are the God who has come among us in Jesus Christ, the bread of life, who feeds our very souls. You nourish us with your word, and you quench our thirst with your Spirit.

Prayer of Confession

O God we come to you, spiritually hungry. We confess that we turn from you, seeking fulfilment elsewhere, spending our money for that which is not bread, and labouring for that which does not satisfy. We pray together for your grace and your pardon. Forgive in us what has gone wrong, repair in us what is wasted, reveal in us what is good. And nourish us with better food than we could ever purchase: your Word, your love, your daily bread for life's journey in the company of Jesus Christ our Lord. In his name and in his words we pray together, saying...

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.**

StF 615 – Let love be real

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| 1) Let love be real, in giving and receiving,
Without the need to manage and to own;
A haven free from posing and pretending,
Where every weakness may be safely known.
Give me your hand, along the desert pathway,
Give me your love wherever we may go. | 2) Let love be real, not grasping or confining,
That strange embrace that holds yet sets us free;
That helps us face the risk of truly living,
And makes us brave to be what we might be.
Give me your strength when all my
words are weakness;
Give me your love in spite of all you know. |
| Ch) <i>As God loves us, so let us love each other:
With no demands, just open hands and
space to grow.</i> | 3) Let love be real, with no manipulation,
No secret wish to harness or control;
Let us accept each other's incompleteness,
And share the joy of learning to be whole.
Give me your hope through dreams
and disappointments;
Give me your trust when all my failings show. |

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We are going to think about 3 mothers who have brought us together here today through their trust and belief in God, a belief which not only changed their life, but also their society, bringing a new vision for the future and each one of us here today.

Reading: Genesis 12: 1-6, 17: 1-8

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. Abram travelled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."

Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."

Sarah, the wife of Abraham had travelled with him when he heard and listened to God's command to leave their home and go to a land where God commanded they travel to. They trusted in God's word and followed his instructions, leaving behind the world and status they had known and entered a new land. Then trouble hit them, their nephew Lot's wife was struck down because she disobeyed God, Sarah lost faith that she would ever bear a child, she was now far too old and so persuaded Abraham to have a child with her servant Hagar. Of course this would never work out; it didn't take long before Sarah felt jealousy and great pain when Hagar a servant gave birth to Ishmael, Abraham's son. Sarah was well past child bearing age, into her 90's when she was told by her husband to feed 3 strangers, invited to eat a meal by her husband Abraham when they appeared near their home in the desert. As she was in her tent she overheard the strangers' conversation with Abraham. Again that familiar promise, she would have a child. What would you have done? Sarah laughed, (I might have choked). She was reprimanded for her cynicism and denied what she done. But guess what? Sarah gave birth to a boy, Isaac, and the world began to change slowly; God's promise was unfolding. Abraham was to be the father of nations and his dependants as many as the stars in the sky.

StF 545 – Be thou my vision

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| 1) Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
Be all else but naught to me, save that thou art;
Be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
Both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light. | 4) Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise:
Be thou mine inheritance now and always, -
Be thou and thou only the first in my heart:
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art. |
| 2) Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
Be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;
Be thou my great Father, thy child let me be;
Be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee. | 5) High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun,
O grant me its joys after vict'ry is won;
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all. |
| 3) Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
Be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;
Be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power. | |

Irish 8th Century translated by Mary Elizabeth Byrne, versified by Eleanor Henrietta Hall

Reading: Luke 1: 26-38

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

Mary a girl betrothed to Joseph, carrying Jesus, the Son of God, visited by a messenger from God in the form of an angel. Mary who carried this precious child was not given physical favours, no palatial dwelling place, just a long difficult journey to give birth in a stable surrounded by animals. Visited by humble Gentile unclean shepherds, later by Gentile unclean scholars who brought strange gifts for the child. Then the flight to Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod. Staying away from her home until the family travelled back to the safety of their home town and return to their safe place.

The words of the song 'Mary did you know?' by Mark Lowry, for quiet reflection...

*Mary, did you know that your baby boy will one day walk on water?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy will save our sons and daughters?
Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new?
This child that you've delivered will soon deliver you*

*Mary, did you know that your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy will calm a storm with His hand?
Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod?
And when you kiss your little baby you've kissed the face of God
Mary, did you know?*

*The blind will see, the deaf will hear and the dead will live again.
The lame will leap, the dumb will speak the praises of the Lamb*

*Mary, did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy will one day rule the nations?
Did you know that your baby boy is heaven's perfect Lamb?
This sleeping child you're holding is the Great I Am*

A Prayer of Susanna Wesley:

Help me, Lord, to remember that religion is not to be confined to the church, or closet, nor exercised only in prayer and meditation, but that everywhere I am in Your presence. So may my every word and action have a moral content.

StF 345 – And can it be

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| 1) And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain?
For me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me? | 2) 'Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
Let angel minds enquire no more. |
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3) He left his Father's throne above
So free, so infinite his grace
Emptied himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For, O my God, it found out me!

5) No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!
Alive in him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ, my own.

4) Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray -
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

Charles Wesley

Susanna Wesley (born Annesley, 20 January 1669 to 23rd July 1742) was the daughter of Samuel Annesley and Mary White and also the mother of John and Charles Wesley.

"... although she never preached a sermon or published a book or founded a church she is known as the Mother of Methodism. Why? Because two of her sons John and Charles Wesley, who as children, consciously or unconsciously, applied the example and teachings and circumstances of their home life"

The Methodist Church in Britain adds that as a writer, theologian and teacher she also needs recognition in her own right. Susanna was the youngest of 25 children. Her father Samuel Annesley was a Dissenter from the established church in England. At the age of 12, Susanna stopped attending her father's church and joined the Church of England.

She and Samuel Wesley were married on 11 November 1688; Samuel was 26, Susanna 19. Together they had 19 children; 9 of her children died as infants, four of those who died were twins, and a maid accidentally smothered one child. At her death only eight of her children were still alive. Susanna experienced many hardships throughout her life. Her husband left her and the children for over a year because of a minor dispute.

To her absent husband, Susanna Wesley wrote:

I am a woman, but I am also the mistress of a large family. And though the superior charge of the souls contained in it lies upon you, yet in your long absence I cannot but look upon every soul you leave under my charge as a talent committed to me under your trust. I am not a man nor a minister, yet as a mistress I felt I had to do more than I had yet done. I resolved to begin with my own children; in which I observe the following method: I take such a proportion of time as I can spare every night to discourse with every child apart. On Monday I speak with Molly, on Tuesday with Hetty, Wednesday with Nancy, Thursday with Jacky, Friday with Patty, Saturday with Charles.

Samuel Wesley spent time in jail twice due to his poor financial ability and the lack of money was a constant struggle for Susanna. The house was burned down twice; during one of the fires John nearly died and had to be rescued from the second storey window. She was the primary source of her children's education. After the second fire, Susanna was forced to place her children into different homes for nearly two years whilst Epworth Rectory was rebuilt. During the time the Wesley children lived in different houses they lived under the rules of the homes they lived in. Susanna was mortified that her children began to use improper speech and play more than study.

Under no circumstances were the children permitted to have any lessons until they reached their fifth year, but the day after their fifth birthday their formal education began. They attended classes for six hours and on their very first day they were supposed to learn the whole of the alphabet. All her children except two, managed this feat and to Susanna they were very backward.

The children got a good education, daughters included. They all learned Latin and Greek and were tutored in the classical studies that were traditional in England at that time.

During the time her husband was in London defending a friend against charges of heresy, he appointed a locum to deliver the message. The sermons revolved entirely on repaying debts. The lack of spiritual teaching caused Susanna to gather her children on Sunday afternoon for family services. They would sing a psalm and then Susanna would read a sermon from either her husband's or father's sermon file followed by another psalm. The local people began to ask if they could attend. At one point there were over 200 people who would attend Susanna's Sunday afternoon service while the morning service dwindled to nearly nothing.

Wesley practised daily devotions throughout her life, reflecting on her experiences of the depravity of her human nature and the grace of God. Her husband Samuel spent his whole life and all the family finances on his exegetical work of the Book of Job. By contrast Susanna wrote several pieces that would be fundamental in the education of her children. She also wrote meditations and scriptural commentaries for her own use, including on The Apostles Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments.

StF 550 – Forth in thy name

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| 1) Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go,
My daily labour to pursue,
Thee, only thee, resolved to know
In all I think, or speak, or do. | 4) Give me to bear thy easy yoke,
And every moment watch and pray,
And still to things eternal look,
And hasten to thy glorious day; |
| 2) The task thy wisdom has assigned
O let me cheerfully fulfil,
In all my works thy presence find,
And prove thy good and perfect will. | 5) For thee delightfully employ
Whate'er thy bounteous grace has given,
And run my course with even joy,
And closely walk with thee to heaven. |
| 3) Thee may I set at my right hand,
Whose eyes my inmost substance see,
And labour on at thy command,
And offer all my works to thee. | |

Charles Wesley

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Praise God who loves us. Praise God who cares for the care of those who mother us.
Thanks be to God for their patience when tested. Thanks be to God for love when tired.
Thanks be to God for their hope when despairing. Thanks be to God for their service without limit.
Thank you God for mothering love. Thank you God for care and concern.
Thank you God for the joys we share. Thank you God for the pains we bear.
Thankyou God for all we are given by you, through Jesus Christ our Lord **Amen**

Prayers of Intercession

God of love **hear our prayer**

Loving God you have given us the right to be called children of God. Help us to show your love in our homes that they might be places of love, security and truth.

God of love **hear our prayer**

Loving God, Jesus your Son was born into the family of Mary and Joseph. Bless all parents and all who care for children, strengthen those families living under stress and may your love be known where no human love is found.

God of love **hear our prayer**

Loving God we pray for all who look after children and families. We pray for voluntary sector organisations, community groups, social workers, teachers and health visitors - all those working in our community
God of love **hear our prayer**

Loving God we thank for the family of the church. We pray that all may find in her their true home, that the lonely, the marginalised, the rejected may be welcomed and loved. On this day we pray especially for those who long to be parents, for those who work away from their children and those who suffer from the pain of losing their child. We pray especially for those for whom Mothering Sunday is a day of pain and regret.

God of love **hear our prayer. Amen**

StF 687 – One human family God has made

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| 1) One human family God has made,
And all for each to care.
One world, to be the home of all,
With all its wealth to share.
One Christ, to manifest on earth
Love's ultimate design.
One Church to know the mystery
Of broken bread and wine. | 3) And are we brave enough to join
With that great company -
The cost not less than all we have
And are or hope to be -
The bitter cup of human sin
To drink with him who died,
And take his love outside the wall
To all the crucified? |
| 2) One race, one world - yet torn apart,
We spurn the way of love.
But still ahead, the Christ leads on
And calls his Church to move
From love of power to power of love,
To give the word to all -
To trust the love that conquered death,
Outside the city wall. | 4) Claim him who claims us for his own,
To share his pain and grief,
To bear the scars that stamp us his -
The hallmark of belief.
As partners of the living Christ,
Who risk the path he trod,
With wondering love we find we share
The timeless joy of God. |

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Blessing

Praise God who loves. Praise God who cares.
May God who gave birth to all creation, bless us.
May God who became incarnate through an earthly mother, bless us.
May God who broods like a mother over her children, bless us.
May almighty God bless us, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and forever.
Through the prophet Isaiah, God says, 'As a mother comforts her children, so I will comfort you.'
The peace of the Lord be always with us. **Amen**