

HOW Mission Community & KSAT Worship Service for 19th March 2021: Mothering Sunday

We thank Joyce Worsfold for this week's Mothering Sunday service.

Isaiah 66:13 – ‘As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you:’

The Bible assures us many times, that God is our Father and Mother, that we are adopted as His children and are greatly loved. In Hosea he speaks of God being *‘like a mother bear robbed of her cubs’* and in Deuteronomy of being *‘like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young’*.

In Matthew 23: 39 we hear these words of Jesus, *‘How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings and you were not willing.’*

There is such tenderness and compassion in these words, such a longing for people to come to Him and, reading such words, we realise afresh that we are all part of His great creation, often referred to in the world as ‘Mother Earth’. What a loving God we serve!

Let us come into His presence now and in a few moments of silence open ourselves to enjoy that love and feel his incomparable peace... *Silence*

Prayer

Father God it is so good to be here, to spend time with You – to break away for a while from all that deprives us of coming close to You. Oh Lord, how we need to feel Your presence, how we crave Your Holy Spirit to wash right over us and fill us to the brim. Without You we are so feeble and frail. Without You we lose confidence in our abilities. Without You we become lost, afraid or confused. We **know** that You fill us with confidence, strength and power yet, so often, we bumble along trying to do things in our own strength, attempting to understand and act with our own might.

We ask for Your forgiveness, Lord. Help us to seek You throughout our busy days and sleepless nights; to **make** time for You, to **create** space for You to enter every part of our lives. Help us, Father, to show and tell of Your wonderful love, power and grace. **Amen.**

Father forgive me, Lord Keep me close to You.

Hymn MP 502 – O let the Son of God enfold you

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjVLUY_dNLk

O let the Son of God enfold you with His Spirit and His love
Let Him fill your heart and satisfy your soul; O let Him have the things that hold you
And His Spirit like a dove will descend upon your life and make you whole

Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill Your lambs. Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill Your lambs.

O come and sing this song with gladness as your hearts are filled with joy
Lift your hands in sweet surrender to His name. O give Him all your tears and sadness
Give Him all your years of pain and you'll enter into life in Jesus' name.

Reflection

Many people might think that being a mother today might have no relevance to times past and in some ways that it true. When my daughter gave birth to her children, many things were different from when she was a baby, disposable nappies for one thing! Such luxury! Even her pregnancy was very different as she was able to see her child whilst still in the womb whereas I did not even know I was going to give birth to two babies rather than the one I expected. That came as quite a shock!

Mothering is a complex, many-faceted role comprising a multitude of skills, patience and other personal qualities, yet God chose a young, uneducated girl to be the mother of *His* Son. Why was this? God saw into her heart, He knew her through and through. For we know that He sees not as humans see, as He said to Samuel, *‘The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’* (1 Samuel 16:7)

Being a mother is an incredibly important job, an enormous privilege and certainly not confined to those who physically give birth. I believe that God calls many women to have a tremendously important maternal role in the world today. I well remember sitting in a hospital bed cuddling my first-born and feeling woefully inadequate for the task ahead. I was fortunate – I had excellent role models in my own mother and my grandmother and in Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Throughout each of the Gospels we see the changing scenes of life for Mary, as a mother. What a journey she travelled. From a tiny house in a village where she met an angel who gave her some unbelievable news— she would give birth to a child who was the Son of God! Then she had to leave her home and all that she knew and go with her new husband, whom she had not yet come to know, to Bethlehem and she was nine-months pregnant at the time. And here was a town heaving with people from all walks of life, all there because of a Roman edict about a census. A town in which there was no room to sleep let alone give birth. All that must have been very scary. She gives birth in a stable without any help and, after the birth, whilst she was still coming to terms with its physical effects and still getting to understand a baby's needs, there are visits from strangers, who somehow know that her son had been born and exactly who He is. Then they have to run away to a foreign country to escape certain death. There they have to learn to nurture and care for a baby in this strange place without support, until it is safe to return home. Not an auspicious beginning to motherhood!

The Gospels show us tiny snapshots of her life as a mother; something of her fear and panic when her child, aged 12 goes missing on the way back home from Jerusalem. They hurry back to the city to search for Him and are stunned to find Him in the temple, the centre of attention, asking questions and debating with learned priests and scribes. Through all these events we are told of Mary's wonder. She feels joy in this difficult role '*all generations will call me blessed*' (Luke 1) She is filled with gratitude and thankfulness, '*My spirit rejoices in God my saviour*' and we are told that she '*treasured all these things in her heart*'. Let us think on the changing scenes in our lives as we sing.

Hymn MP 702 –Through all the changing scenes of Life.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TxegwBUYows>

Through all the changing scenes of life, in trouble and in joy,
The praises of my God shall still, my heart and tongue employ.

Of His deliverance I will boast, till all that are distressed,
From my example comfort take and charm their griefs to rest/

Oh, magnify the Lord with me, with me exalt His name;
When in distress to Him I called, He to my rescue came.

The hosts of God encamp around the dwellings of the just;
Deliverance He affords to all, who on His succour trust.

Oh, make but trial of His love, experience will decide
How blest they are, and only they, who in His truth confide.

Fear Him, ye saints, and you will then have nothing else to fear;
Make you His service your delight, your wants shall be His care.

Reading –Luke 8: 19-21 Jesus' Mother and brothers

Now Jesus' mother and brothers came to see Him, but they were not able to get near Him because of the crowd. Someone told Him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you." He replied, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice."

Reflection

As I look back on my time as a mother I often think that childhood was the easy bit. Ok, there were sleepless nights, worries over illness, temper tantrums and all manner of problems but generally we were all together in our home and we as parents were free to make our own decisions and to love, enjoy, train and play with our children. When we went out we held hands tightly to keep them safe and were able to tuck them up in bed and kiss them goodnight.

When our children grow up and become independent however, life is very different. We lose 'control'; we don't know where they are or what they are doing! We can only hope that the way that we brought them up and the things that we taught will stand them in good stead and that they will be enabled to make good decisions. The other thing of course is that we miss them especially at this time, during this awful pandemic. How we long to hug them, to hold the people that we love and simply to chat face to face.

How hard it must have been for Mary. Jesus was so busy. So many people needed Him, there was much to do and he knew that His time to heal and teach and preach was going to be very short. Three years to build the kingdom! Not even the five years given to a Methodist minister in one placement! There was a great urgency to his work, places to go, people to meet, I suspect that Mary rarely saw her Son. It's not always easy is it when our children become adults?

This short reading says so much. I can imagine Mary standing on tiptoe on the edge of the crowd, just trying to catch a glimpse of Him. The crowd was so dense they could not get near but a message was passed along and relayed to Him. He could have waved or passed back a message saying 'I'll call later.' But He didn't. It's easy to imagine what Mary's feelings of loss and disappointment were. But, as always, she listened to His words and to God and then she understood.

Sometimes poetry conveys more than prose:

The True Gift of Family

The growing crowd gathered and peered
Pursuers and petitioners
Streamed around Him like a lake
Lost fragments of loveliness.
Gaunt faces stretched with pain
Wrinkles like ribbons wreathing flesh
Some with weary malnourished walk
And in the midst of it all...My Son!
Speaking sunlight, healing hurts.

Here WE are!

Some have said things that have cracked and chipped my sense of self
Have pressed thorns to pierce my heart
And hurled their words like ropes to fasten
Snuffing out certainties.

I needed to see Him, I just wanted a word
'MUM' would have done,
But I should have known,
'*Who is my mother?*'

The words drenched the loaded air
Leering faces sneered and sniggered
'*Who are my brothers?*'

BUT...

His arms reached out to **circle all**
'*Here is my mother and my brothers!*'

His face leaked love
His arms were power and light
It was as if He held US tight
Our hearts healed, our longings filled.

My soul's sweetest song
His eyes clung to mine and rich air dazzled
I could smell the sweet breath of His goodbye
And was pierced by inexplicable joy!

Hymn MP 162 – From heaven you

came. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0FSZ_iSYO8

From heaven You came helpless babe, entered our world, Your glory veiled
Not to be served but to serve and give Your life that we might live

*This is our God, The Servant King. He calls us now to follow Him
To bring our lives as a daily offering of worship to The Servant King*

There in the garden of tears, my heavy load He chose to bear
His heart with sorrow was torn, 'Yet not My will but Yours, ' He said

Come see His hands and His feet; the scars that speak of sacrifice
Hands that flung stars into space to cruel nails surrendered

So, let us learn how to serve and in our lives enthrone Him
Each other's needs to prefer, for it is Christ we're serving

Reading John 19:25-27

²⁵ *Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene.* ²⁶ *When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to her, "Woman, here is your son,"* ²⁷ *and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.*

Reflection

Mary as a mother was obedient, she was there when she was needed, she was supportive and understanding. Mary was there at the end, she didn't shrink from the sight of her beloved son, nailed so cruelly to a cross and indeed, that sword mentioned by Simeon all those years before, *'and a sword will pierce through your own soul also'*. I wonder how many times in the intervening years those words chimed loud in her brain.

What agony this scene on the hillside must have been, what loneliness and despair must have engulfed her. And yet... Jesus saw His mother there. We can only imagine that moment when their eyes met and their souls fused as all their love for one another poured out.

One of Jesus' last acts was to think of Her safety, to ensure that she was cared for and although she had other sons His command was for John, *'the disciple whom Jesus loved'* to take her to his home and *become* her Son. Mary was to be *his mother*, not just a friend. Jesus knew their needs and understood just how much comfort and care they were each silently crying out for.

To return to one of my earlier points, a *woman does not have to give birth to be a mother*, there are millions of people in the world today who desperately need mothering (and of course fathering) and I believe that we should always be on the alert for those who need the shelter of a wing. Many years ago at the chapel where I grew up and then took my children, a new minister arrived, Alice. She was much older than I but we became firm friends. Fast forward 30 years or so, long after her retirement, and that friendship was as strong as ever. My mother had Alzheimer's' disease and had not known me for years. I remember taking her flowers and a card on Mothering Sunday and her saying, 'I'm not your mother, I'm not anyone's mother, I'm Violet.' It was a very low moment for me.

The week after, it was Alice's birthday. When searching for a card I found one that said, *'You are like a mother to me'*. She didn't replace my Mum, I loved my mother dearly, but for the rest of her life Alice mothered me and I became the daughter that she had never had. When we have children, we never know what roads they will take, we cannot smother them in cotton wool, we just have to let them go, pray for them and trust them to God who loves them as a Mother and Father.

We need also to be prepared to mother or father anyone who needs us in this difficult and war-torn world. As Gods' children we all have so much to give.

Happy Mothers' Day!

Song – Mary did you know.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IljD-ETxEw>

Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy would one day walk on water?
Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy would save our sons and daughters?
Did you know that your Baby Boy has come to make you new?
This Child that you 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 the storm with His hand?
Did you know that your Baby Boy has walked where angels trod?
When you kiss your little Baby, you kissed the face of God?

The blind will see; the deaf will hear; 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 would one day rule the nations?
Did you know that your Baby Boy is heaven's perfect Lamb?
The sleeping Child you're holding is the great, I AM

PRAYERS.

Loving Father, what a joy it is to be loved. Thank you for all the love that will be shared on this Mothering Sunday and we pray for all Mothers throughout the earth at this special time and this difficult and painful time. We pray especially today for all who have lost mothers or other family members due to this plague that has decimated and destroyed so much. Lord we long for all that are bereaved to know your comfort; undergird us all with Your strength and help us to experience deep peace and the reassurance of Your presence.

Father we think of all Your children and especially those in countries where clean water is a luxury and sanitation virtually non-existent. Even though we may never meet these people help us to Mother them in whatever ways are possible. We pray for organisations such as Christian Aid, Tear Fund, Compassion, The Rainbow Trust, C.A.P. and so many others. Grant Lord that huge numbers of people will give generously and lovingly as 'Mothers' and 'Fathers' to fill people's lives with good things.

Thanks to television and so many other sources we can look into the lives of families who are enduring unimaginable difficulties. We think of mothers in the Yemen washing clothes, combing hair and taking children each day to their bombed out schools so that they have some hope for the future in more peaceful times. Lord help us to keep on praying and helping and making peace possible. We think of people in Myanmar standing up bravely for democracy, young people working to make things better and mothers and fathers praying that they will come home safely.

So much poverty, Father and so much pain. Revitalise Your church, re-energise Your people, help us to be like Mary, to listen, to obey and to understand what You want us to do. **Amen.**

Hymn MP152 – For the beauty of the earth

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVQFEgT7E6c>

For the beauty of the earth, for the glory of the skies
For the love which from our birth, over and around us lies.
Lord of all, to Thee we raise; this our joyful hymn of praise

For the beauty of each hour; of the day and of the night
Hill and vale and tree and flower; sun and moon and stars of light

For the joy of human love, brother, sister, parent, child
Friends on earth and friends above; for all gentle thoughts and mild

For each perfect gift of Thine to our race so freely given
Graces human and divine; flowers of earth and buds of heaven

The Grace