

Worship at Home
Mothering Sunday 10th March 2024

Prepared by Rev John Archer

A “Health Warning”

In the Mothering Sunday service I wrote in 2023 I included “A Health Warning”. The situation has not changed so I have again included it. An absurd practice has developed such that if anything slightly contentious is written then the reader has to be warned in advance. In this service which centres on a mother (Mary) it is to be understood that the mothering function can be undertaken by either gender and by people who are not the biological parent. Also, in our C.F congregation a lot of people will have lost their mothers some time ago. It might be helpful to you if, in addition to 'thanks for the memory,' you focussed on an existing mother you know, who you could support in your prayers.

Call to Worship

God of compassion throughout history you cherished your people, bending down in love and teaching us to walk in freedom. We worship you. Jesus our brother in your human life you welcomed children and made them a sign of the coming of the Kingdom. We praise you Holy Spirit wild wind brooding over all creation, you are the midwife of our longings. We wonder at your works.

Read pray or sing StF 18

Be still and know that I am God.

[Be Still and Know \(with lyrics\) - The most Peaceful Hymn \(youtube.com\)](#)

- 1 Be still and know that I am God.
Be still and know that I am God.
Be still and know that I am God.
- 2 I am the Lord who saves and heals.
I am the Lord who saves and heals.
I am the Lord who saves and heals.
- 3 In you, O Lord, I put my trust.
In you, O Lord, I put my trust.
In you, O Lord, I put my trust.

Anonymous
Based on Psalm 46:10-11

Prayers

We thank you for those who perform the role of mother in our society whoever they are.

for all they mean or have meant to us,
for the love they have shown and the care
they have given,
for the dedication that they show,
the sacrifices they make,
the support they offer
and the guidance they provide.

We thank you loving God for this day of saying thank you, for this opportunity to say what we so often mean to say but rarely do.

For mothers and motherhood, for children and families we bring you this day our grateful praise.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

We pray the Lord's Prayer together

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**

Bible Readings

Exodus 2 : 1 - 10

Luke 2 : 22 – 35

John 19 : 25 – 27

Read pray or sing STF 232

Through long years of watchful waiting

- 1 Through long years of watchful waiting
Simeon's deep devotion shone:
gratefully the child he cradles,
humbly holds God's Holy One;
rests content in life's quiet evening,
now his Temple task is done.
- 2 So God's age-long word of promise
in that place is realised;
his salvation now embodied
as a helpless infant cried;
hearing Simeon's pointed blessing
Mary's heart is crucified.

3 In the following years she watched him
as he pondered God's intent;
in that teeming crowd she lost him,
as his searching way he went;
in her grief, the son she mothered
for the whole world's need was spent.

4 As the end of Christ's obedience
on that towering cross appears:
Mary watches with the women
as the soldiers swing their spears;
Simeon's word she recollected,
and her love dissolved in tears.

5 In Christ's death outside the city
God's own heart is pierced with pain:
in this world's unending conflict,
seeds of hope on earth remain;
in the light of patient servants
Christ's self-giving lives again.

Thomas G. Wilkinson (b. 1943)

Prayers for Help

Our Heavenly Father we come to you, bringing
all our anxieties about preparing our children &
grandchildren to live in an uncertain world.

Help us and all parents to prepare them
wisely for the problems and opportunities of
growing up.

Teach us how to temper discipline with
love and to balance restraint with freedom.

Give us such faith in you that it shines
through all we say and do, that they may
experience its joy and, in their own time, commit
themselves to follow Jesus your son.

Amen

Read pray or sing StF 477

Teach me to dance

[Teach Me To Dance \(Singing the Faith 477 / StF 477\) by Graham Kendrick & Steve Thompson \(youtube.com\)](#)

*Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart,
teach me to move in the power of your Spirit,
teach me to walk in the light of your presence,
teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.*

*Teach me to love with your heart of compassion,
teach me to trust in the word of your promise,
teach me to hope in the day of your coming,
teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.*

1 You wrote the rhythm of life,
created heaven and earth;
in you is joy without measure.
So, like a child in your sight,
I dance to see your delight,
for I was made for your pleasure,
pleasure.

2 Let all my movements express
a heart that loves to say 'yes,'
a will that leaps to obey you.
Let all my energy blaze
to see the joy in your face,
let my whole being praise you,
praise you.

*Graham Kendrick (b. 1950) and Steve
Thompson*

Sermon

Parenthood is painful. We bring pain at our birth
and sorrow at our death. Any love has its pain but
most mothers would say that the pain of
childbirth is of a different order from anything
else we normally experience. Ask the mother of
Moses who put her precious son in a basket to
save him from his enemies. She would tell you.
Ask Mary as she and Joseph fled from the
soldiers in Bethlehem who wanted to kill her son.
She would tell you. Today's readings tell the 2
stories and in each there is a mother suffering
heartache because of her love for her baby son.
But it also brings great joy. The TV series about
midwives shows this well. In all these
circumstances of large families and poverty and
even babies born as a result of prostitution, the
initial reaction to the birth is usually one of joy.
For many of us, in spite of the difficulties and
problems, this joy continues and most of you will
be today giving thanks for the children with
which you have been blessed, and also giving
thanks for your mothers. Yet there are many
parents in our world (and in our country) where
the joy at birth all too soon turns to worry and
sorrow. We see it on the faces nightly of new
mothers and babies in Gaza. It is illustrated in
both the Bible passages.

In Exodus we hear about the Hebrew mother of
Moses (Jochabed) who had to hide him in the
bullrushes because Pharaoh had ordered the
Baby Hebrew boys to be killed. We know when

we turn to the story of Mary (our main focus today) there are parallel experiences of joy turning to anxiety and pain. Jochabed had to watch wait and worry until she sees her baby scooped out of the water by an Egyptian princess. That is what mothers do – watch worry and remember. Mary was going to have to do that for the next 30 years.

1. Mary standing in the Temple

The Temple was a man's world, women seen but not usually heard. She watches and waits whilst the due ceremonies are performed on her first-born son. Of course, her child was special as every child is special to its mother. There had been special events and we read that “*Mary treasured these things in her heart*” when the shepherds turned up at his birth. Simeon burst on the scene, scoops up the child like Pharaoh's daughter. He says “*This child is destined to be a sign which men reject and you too will be pierced to the heart.*”. Here was this strange man holding her son thanking God for letting him see this wonder before he died, and in the same breath telling her that she would be pierced to the heart. Mary watches and waits.

2. Mary at the wedding in Galilee

Do whatever he tells you she says to the wine waiters at the wedding in Cana. Later she waits patiently outside with his brothers when he is too busy teaching to see them. She hears them say *Isn't this the carpenter's son, the son of Mary?*” when he is back on home turf and puts up with insults. When she stands at the foot of the cross, pierced to the heart, does she remember the words of Simeon?

Here was a Messiah who was not going to fulfil people's expectations. Instead, here was a Messiah who was going to suffer. It was probably not what Simeon had waited for. It was certainly not what Mary wanted for her son, but the Spirit had overwhelmed her at his birth, and she knew he was not hers to control. We all load expectations onto our children. We want so much for them, and from them and sometimes it can be too much for them. Sometimes we have to suffer with them, and like Mary have to stand by and watch, worry and remember.

The life and actions of Jesus caused Mary much pain. When he left home and became an itinerant preacher, she could not understand what on earth he was doing. She came with some of her other children to take him home with them, but he refused and turning to the crowd he told them they were his mother and sister and brothers. That certainly must have hurt. But it all got worse until he was arrested crucified and killed and she held his dead body in her hands. A sword indeed pierced her own soul. Thankfully it didn't end there. She had stuck with him to the end, and then she shared in the joy of the resurrection.

Of course, the great majority of you worshipping today in church or online, are content and your children give you great happiness. There may however be others (or others you know) who feel that piercing sword. Some children do well and stay close to us. Others may go away like Jesus but seem to find themselves in trouble. The important thing is that we should never give up on our children. We should never stop loving them. If they are having a bad time in their business or their marriage, they need our support not our interference. Sometimes we can only, like Mary, watch silently. Our love must be constant as is God's love for us.

The 2 stories we have looked at today showed God bringing humanity back to its creator. One child will become the prophet Moses leading his people through the desert to a promised land. The other, Jesus, leads his people through a different kind of desert, which is not for the chosen few but for all humanity – us.

This is not a story about mother love. It is a story about God's love for a fallen world and the lengths to which God's love will go to set his children free and bring them home. And so, at the end, we come to the heart of the matter. Mary was not the only one to be pierced to the heart. Jesus wept over Jerusalem as he walked to his last hours. On that day God too was pierced to the heart, like a mother, watching and remembering the long story of creation and the love that will not let us go. It is God's mother love which saves us all and gives hope in this wicked world.

Amen

Read pray or sing this lovely hymn by Fred Pratt Green, (Tune Hymns & Psalms 585)

1. How great the debt we owe
to those who love us most.
They give us birth and help us grow
and rarely count the cost.

2 To make us feel secure
they lose their life in ours;
and what they mean to us is more
than we can say with flowers

3. How can we measure love?
Yet treasure it we must
For what God gives us from above
Is held by us in trust.++++

4. Then let us vow today,
As those who know loves worth
To love to worship and obey
the Lord of all the earth

Prayers for Others

We thank you for your great and never ending love, which never stops seeking us out. And so today we pray for those who feel unloved, whose relationships have been broken through separation, divorce or bereavement. For those who have never enjoyed the relationship that they might have had – children unwanted by their parents, parents alienated from their children, family members estranged from one another.

Lord in your mercy reach out in love. We pray for individuals who feel rejected by society, have no confidence, no place where they feel accepted, have no sense of their own worth. We pray for communities divided by prejudice, race or religion, and for nations broken by war and natural disaster. We especially remember families in Ukraine some of whom have found safety in our country but where most struggle to keep together. and alive. Similar terrible situations for families exist in disaster areas of Gaza.

Lord in your mercy reach out in love.
Almighty God bring friendship to the lonely
reconciliation to the estranged

harmony to the divided
and comfort to the bereaved.

Lord in your mercy reach out in love and, where it is within our power, may we be part of the outreach.

In the name of Christ we ask it.
Amen

Read, pray or sing HP367

Lord of the home

Lord of the home, your only Son
Received a mother's tender love.
And from an earthly father won
His vision of your home above.

Help us, O Lord, our homes to make
Your Holy Spirit's dwelling-place;
Our hands and hearts devotion take
To be the servants of your grace.

Teach us to keep our homes so fair
That, were our Lord a child once more,
He might be glad our hearth to share,
And find a welcome at our door.

Lord, may your Spirit sanctify
Each household duty we fulfil;
May we our Master glorify
In glad obedience to your will.

Albert F Bayley (1901-84)

Blessing

Whoever you are, wherever you go
whatever your strengths
whatever your weaknesses
God will be with you
to hold to heal to guide and to bless
Go then in peace and be assured of his love.

Amen

Acknowledgements

*Some prayers are amended prayers from
"Prayers for All Seasons" by Nick Fawcett*

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