

Dear friends,

We have reached the fourth Sunday in Lent – Mothering Sunday – and, as always, I wish you all every blessing. I hold you in my thoughts and prayers each week and hope that this time together is one of fellowship for you just as it is for me. God bless. Margaret

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Few Christian festivals can have undergone as many changes as Mothering Sunday in recent years. Its original emphasis on motherhood and ‘mother church’ eventually broadened into a celebration of Christian families – though nowadays those traditional patterns of family life have largely disintegrated under weight of information technology, media influence and ease of travel. The Church has always championed the family as part of God’s created order, but, as we know, many people experience family life as anything but positive or joyful - and inevitably they feel uncomfortable or even offended when prayers rejoice in in what they have found to be painful, or if it appears to exclude them because they feel so differently. Any such celebration of the family must therefore be very sensitive to those who have suffered through family or marital breakdown, abusive treatment, inadequate parenting, or bereavement – and not least to those who, to their great sadness, have been unable to have the children they long for. We need to try to emphasise the nurturing role of the church and, as people trying to follow Jesus Christ, show understanding, compassion and love towards others.

The words to ‘Come let us sing of a wonderful love’ by Robert Walmsley [1831-1905] StF 443

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.

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.

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.

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.

Prayer and Lord’s Prayer:

We give God thanks for his gifts or relationships and community – for parental love and care, which enfolds us in our early years – for a mother’s love, which nurtures and protects her children and for a father’s care, which supports and provides for his family – for the affection of brothers and sisters, with whom childhood experiences are shared – for the support of wider family who share in joys and sorrows and bring new horizons – for the loyalty and fellowship of friends, who stay by us in good times and bad – and for the Christian family, with whom we share faith in Christ and the hope of heaven. Lord, we give you thanks and praise your holy name in the glory of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and friend. Amen.

Lord, we are sorry for the times when we have failed to respect our parents or encourage our families. We are sorry for any unkind words and selfish actions which spoil family life and love. We are sorry for any uncaring attitudes and unfair judgements which create unhappiness and resentment.

We are sorry if we have been ungrateful or self-centred, taking for granted all that we have and enjoy. Lord, forgive our sin, and help us to do your will, to the honour and the glory of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Almighty God, our merciful and forgiving Father, pardons all our sins in thought, word and deed, and restores us to a right relationship with him and with one another, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and 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.

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Exodus 2:1-10.

There was a man from the family of Levi who decided to marry a woman from the tribe of Levi. She became pregnant and gave birth to a baby boy. The mother saw how beautiful the baby was and hid him for three months. She hid for as long as she could. After three months she made a basket and covered it with tar so that it would float. Then she put the baby in the basket and put the basket in the river in the tall grass. The baby's sister stayed and watched to see what would happen to the baby. Just then, Pharaoh's daughter went to the river to bathe. She saw the basket in the tall grass. Her servants were walking by the river, so she told one of them to go and get the basket. The king's daughter opened the basket and saw a baby boy. The baby was crying and she felt sorry for it. Then she noticed that it was one of the Hebrew babies.

The baby's sister was still hiding. She stood and asked the king's daughter: 'Do you want me to go and find a Hebrew woman who can nurse the baby and help you care for it?'

The king's daughter said: 'Yes, please.'

So the girl went and brought the baby's own mother.

The king's daughter said to the mother: 'Take this baby and feed him for me. I will pay you to take care of him.' So the woman took her baby and cared for him.

The baby grew, and after some time, the woman gave her baby to the king's daughter. The king's daughter accepted the baby as her own son. She called him Moses because she had pulled him out of the water.

1 Samuel 1: 1-11

There was a man named Elkinah from the Zuph family who lived in Ramah in the hill country of Ephraim. Elkinah was the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph from the tribe of Ephraim.

Elkinah had two wives. One wife was named Hannah, the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, Hannah did not. Every year Elkinah left his town of Ramah and went up to Shiloh.

He worshipped the Lord All-Powerful at Shiloh and offered up sacrifices to the Lord there. Shiloh was where Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, served as priests of the Lord. Whenever Elkinah offered his sacrifices, he always gave one share of the food to his wife Peninnah and a share to each of Peninnah's children. Elkinah always gave an equal share of the food to Hannah. He did this because he loved her very much, even though the Lord had not let Hannah have any children.

Peninnah always upset Hannah and made her feel bad because the Lord had not made her able to have children. This happened every year when their family went to the Lord's house at Shiloh.

Peninnah would upset Hannah so much that she would begin to cry and would not eat anything. Her husband Elkinah said to her: 'Hannah, why are you crying? Why won't you eat? Why are you so sad? You have me. Isn't that better than having even ten sons?'

After eating and drinking, Hannah quietly got up and went to pray to the Lord. Eli the priest was sitting on a chair near the door of the Lord's Holy Building. Hannah was so sad that she cried the whole time she was praying to the Lord. She made a special promise to God and said: 'Lord All-Powerful, you can see how sad I am. Don't forget me. If you will give me a son, I will give him to you. He will be yours his whole life, and as a Nazirite, he will not drink wine or strong drink, and no-one will ever cut his hair.'

Luke 2: 33-35

Jesus' father and mother were amazed at what Simeon said about their son. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary: 'many Jews will fall and many will rise because of this boy. He will be a sign from God that some will not accept. So the secret thoughts of many will be made know, And the things that happen will be painful for you – like a sword cutting through your heart.'

John 19: 25b-27

Jesus' mother stood near his cross. Her sister was also standing there with Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. Jesus saw his mother. He also saw the follower he loved very much standing there. He said to his mother: 'Dear woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the follower: 'here is your mother.' So after that, this follower took Jesus' mother to live in his own home.

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Today is the middle of Lent – sometimes called Refreshment Sunday' – a break in the routine of Lent when we stop to give thanks for our homes and our loved ones – and especially our mothers. This is a day when we can show our appreciation for all that is done for us.

Today's readings are all about mothers. The mother of Moses hid him from the wicked Pharaoh who would have killed him. To do this meant that Moses' mother risked her life. Even after three months, when she put him in a basket at the riverside, she made sure he was safe. She could have been killed just for loving her son.

Hannah did not think she would ever have a child – but at last she gave birth to Samuel. When she later gave him to the priest, Eli, she brought a little coat each year for her son [1 Samuel 2:19]. She must have sewed it for him with such love.

In the Gospel when Simeon met Mary, he told her that Jesus would be opposed and that a sword would pierce her heart also. Mothers suffer when they see their child suffering – think how Mary suffered when she saw Jesus on the cross.

Let this be a day when we give God thanks for the love around us and show appreciation for our mothers – *[or those who have acted as mothers towards us in our lives, be they related or not, whether they are women or men - Margaret]*

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I am well aware that not all people have had a good experience of family life or mother love and this day can bring back painful memories. Let us hold them in our thoughts and in our prayers and pray that they have others in their lives showing them the love.]

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Prayer

We bring to God our prayers and concerns for families – for those who find family life to be a source of unhappiness and tension – for those who have no family.

For families on the verge of breakdown, unsure where to find relief or a way out of their difficulties – may they know your guidance and wisdom to find an outcome which brings peace to their hearts.

For children who are frightened & insecure, neglected or abused by those they trust & rely on – may they know your loving hand on their lives, and find in you a friend who is always faithful.

For those whose family life is overshadowed by addiction or violence, who live with the consequences of alcohol or drug abuse – may they know your peace and encouragement in helping those unable to help themselves.

For families without a home or adequate resources, whose life is a struggle for survival – may they know the hope you alone can give and trust you to bring them through their troubles.

For those without family or friends, who experience the pain of loneliness as a result of bereavement, divorce or the absence of friendship – may they know your eternal presence alongside, reassuring and comforting them.

Lord of love, receive our prayer which we ask in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Close

Lord, bless our homes and make them open and welcoming in your name.

Lord, bless our families and make them a sign of your love and care.

Lord, bless the lives we now continue living and make them worthy of your kingdom.

Lord, bless us and guide us wherever we go.

Go before us, watch over us, and keep us in your love, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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