

Sunday 14th March 2021

Deacon Sally Wheadon - "Mothering Sunday"

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Welcome and
The Lighting of the Candle *(Sally)*

Call to Worship *(Sally)*
God our Father,
your Son, Jesus Christ,
lived in a family at Nazareth.
As we meet together now
help us to learn more about what it is
to love our families and friends as
you love us.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen.

Hymn StF 077

1 Give thanks to the Lord,
our God and King:
his love endures forever.
For he is good, he is above all
things: his love endures forever.
Sing praise, sing praise.

2 With a mighty hand
and an outstretched arm:
his love endures forever.
For the life that's been reborn:
his love endures forever.
Sing praise, sing praise, x 2

*Forever, God is faithful,
forever God is strong.
Forever God is with us,
forever, forever.*

3 From the rising to the setting sun:
his love endures forever
By the grace of God,
we will carry on:
his love endures forever.
Sing praise, sing praise,
sing praise, sing praise.

Refrain

*Chris Tomlin (born 1972) © 2000
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Opening Prayer (Doreen)

God in whom we move and have our
being, You know us, love us and
sustain us. We praise you for your
goodness. And thank you for your
care.

You created the world and all that is
in it. You knitted us together in our
mother's womb. You made us male
and female in your image. You made
each one of unique and individual.
Unique for relationship with you.
Unique in the talents and gifts we
have to serve you. We had gone
astray, lost in our sin. Like a woman
who had lost her gold coin, You came
looking for us. You sent your son
Jesus to be one of us. He spoke of
your love. Healed the sick, cared for
the poor. Welcomed the outcast.

He longed to gather us under his wings like a mother hen her chicks. He gave up his life so that we might be found in you.

Gracious God, today we especially thank you for mothers. For their care and nurture, for love and support. Wisdom and sacrificial giving. For tears and smiles, encouragement and correction.

Thank you that in such love we see a reflection of you own love for us. Fill us a fresh with your Holy Spirit, that we may know your great love and truth. Anoint us with your spirit's power that we may witness to you and serve you and love your people and world.

To the glory of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

~ written by Howard Carter, and posted on How in the World. <http://howard-carter.blogspot.ca/2012/05/prayer-of-thanksgiving-on-mothers-day.html>

Psalm 139:1-18 NIV (Fiona)

¹You have searched me, LORD, and you know me. ²You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. ³You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.

⁴Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely. ⁵You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.

⁷Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? ⁸If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

⁹If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, ¹⁰even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

¹¹If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," ¹²even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. ¹³For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

¹⁵My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

¹⁷How precious to me are your thoughts, ¹⁸God! How vast is the sum of them! ¹⁸Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand—when I awake, I am still with you.

Reflection (Sally)

In the Bible, Jesus tells us when we pray to say 'Our Father' and John's gospel alone names God as Father over 100 times. There are some beautiful images of God as a loving Father in the Old Testament too. But the truth is, rightly or wrongly, often people's perception of God is shaped by their earthly father or indeed their mother.

I remember reading a story about a young woman whose obsessively religious father almost wrecked her life. He controlled the family home and not in a good way. She was forced to attend church, read the Bible and pray throughout her childhood. He criticised her mercilessly and openly disapproved of her. And so the 'heavenly father' that she came to know turned out to be a larger-than-life expression of her contemptible earthly father. And, needless to say, in her mid-thirties, despite being a bright and beautiful woman with a successful career, she had a mental health crisis.

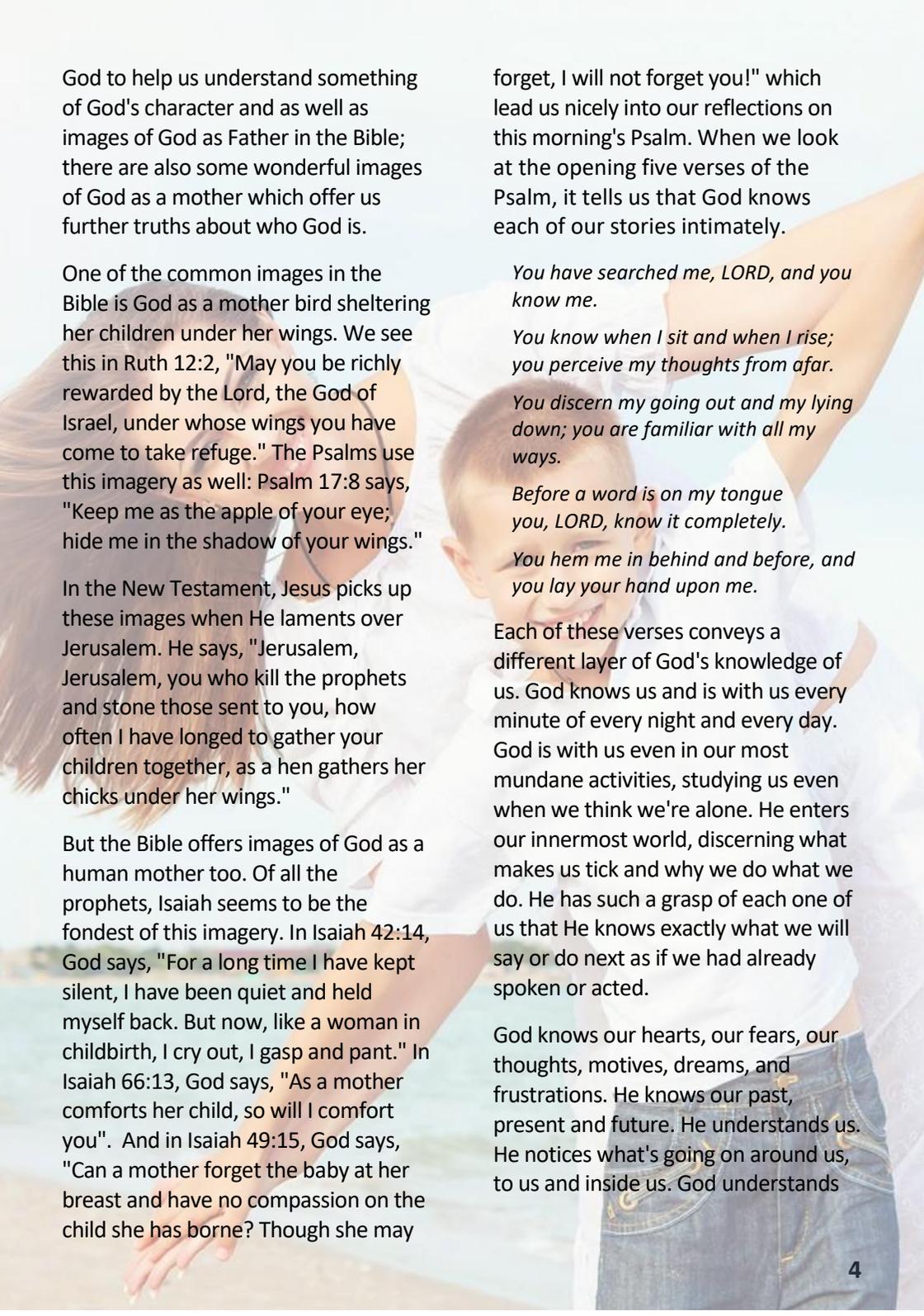
She could recite verses from the Bible and utter religious platitudes about God's love, but in her heart, she believed that God disapproved of virtually everything about her. Well, one day, in conversation with her vicar, he asked her if there was anyone who she felt had really loved her. And suddenly she began to smile, and she replied enthusiastically, 'My Grandmother.'

So the vicar asked her what it was about her grandmother that made her so happy.

So she proceeded to tell him that when she little, at her grandmother's house, she accidentally knocked over a treasured vase, a family heirloom. Knowing how important it was, she screamed as it crashed to the ground. But when her grandmother rushed into the room, she wasn't angry, and she didn't tell her off. Instead, with a look of relief on her face, the grandmother scooped her granddaughter into her arms, and said, "Thank God, I thought you were hurt."

And so the vicar looked this woman in the eye and said, "What if God is like your grandmother and not your dad?" How would it change things if, instead of the harsh father-figure who always put you down, you imagined God as a warm motherly figure who gathers you into her arms when you make a mistake or get something wrong. Well, giving her permission to think of God as her loving grandmother instead of her disapproving father changed the young woman's life, and she began to flourish.

You may think it's wrong to encourage someone to think of God in feminine terms, but the truth is that God is beyond gender and is neither male nor female. God is a mystery beyond all our imagining, and so no representation of God can be taken literally. However, we need images of



God to help us understand something of God's character and as well as images of God as Father in the Bible; there are also some wonderful images of God as a mother which offer us further truths about who God is.

One of the common images in the Bible is God as a mother bird sheltering her children under her wings. We see this in Ruth 12:2, "May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge." The Psalms use this imagery as well: Psalm 17:8 says, "Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings."

In the New Testament, Jesus picks up these images when He laments over Jerusalem. He says, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings."

But the Bible offers images of God as a human mother too. Of all the prophets, Isaiah seems to be the fondest of this imagery. In Isaiah 42:14, God says, "For a long time I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back. But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant." In Isaiah 66:13, God says, "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you". And in Isaiah 49:15, God says, "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may

forget, I will not forget you!" which lead us nicely into our reflections on this morning's Psalm. When we look at the opening five verses of the Psalm, it tells us that God knows each of our stories intimately.

You have searched me, LORD, and you know me.

You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.

You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.

Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely.

You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.

Each of these verses conveys a different layer of God's knowledge of us. God knows us and is with us every minute of every night and every day. God is with us even in our most mundane activities, studying us even when we think we're alone. He enters our innermost world, discerning what makes us tick and why we do what we do. He has such a grasp of each one of us that He knows exactly what we will say or do next as if we had already spoken or acted.

God knows our hearts, our fears, our thoughts, motives, dreams, and frustrations. He knows our past, present and future. He understands us. He notices what's going on around us, to us and inside us. God understands

us and knows us better than we know ourselves.

And that can feel a bit unnerving, but we can rest assured that God knows everything about us, and He loves us still.

I was thinking about verse 6 now. When the Psalm writer, who we believe to be David, reflects on God's thorough knowledge of himself, he concludes that such knowledge is too lofty for him to attain. In other words, he is saying, "I can't grasp this. It's too overwhelming for me, and it's beyond my understanding."

And as he reflects further, David's first instinct is the same as ours - How can I escape? Where can I hide? If God knows everything about me, He knows I'm a hypocrite, and he's heard my lies; He saw what I did last week. And in the following verses, David asks, "Where can I go from you Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence?" And, of course, he concludes that there is nowhere where we can hide from God. God will not let us escape. But God's interest in us is not merely to point out everything we've got wrong, like the father of the woman in our story just now. Instead, God chooses to be in our lives and is determined to give us grace. God is on our side.

Verses 9 and 10 say:

*If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.*

Even if we didn't have a positive experience in our relationship with our earthly parents, we are wanted by God. Over and over in the Bible, we see this affirmed. We are called God's chosen and dearly beloved children. We are told that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. God knows us and wants us. This Psalm tells us that it was God who created our inmost beings and knitted us together in our mother's womb. It tells us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made and that God's works are wonderful.

As we think of that image of God knitting us together, it paints a picture of God's intricate attention to detail, crafting us stitch by stitch. The fact that we are fearfully and wonderfully made speaks of the loving care God took over each and every one of us. Each one of us is totally unique, a one-of-a-kind, right down to our fingerprints. This morning, the young woman in our story, because of her earthly father, had a low sense of self-worth, but this Psalm tells us that God doesn't make rubbish; rather, God's works are wonderful. Each and every one of us is wonderful. We are God's treasured creation, made in God's likeness. God knows us. He made us he wants us, and He has plans for us.

This Psalm tells us that all our days are written in God's book and planned before a single one of them began. God has created each day of our lives, tailoring circumstances, establishing boundaries, and fashioning opportunities for His glory and our good. But God doesn't just set the plan in motion and look the other way. His thoughts are on us constantly. He greets us each morning with fresh mercy and new opportunities, ready to go through the hours with us. He loves our company. And He has specific plans for each of us which we alone can fulfill. What a wonderful image of God this Psalm offers us.

As we reflect on Mothering Sunday, it may be that for you, your lasting memory of your mother or father is something hurtful that they said or did that still wounds you today. Or it may be that they didn't say the words you were longing to hear or do the things you longed for them to do. But we mustn't draw conclusions about ourselves based on what other people say or do. We must look higher. If we want to know how much we are truly loved, we must look to God because we matter to God so much that He sent His Son to die for us. If, like me, Mothering Sunday is a happy day for you, full of wonderful memories, we give God thanks and praise for that, but whatever Mothering Sunday may mean to you, never forget, we belong, loved and cherished, and we are God's forever! Amen.

Hymn Singing the Faith 058

Lord, I come before your throne
of grace; I find rest in Your
presence, And fulness of joy.
In worship and wonder
I behold Your face, Singing
what a faithful God have I.

*What a faithful God have I,
What a faithful God.
What a faithful God have I,
Faithful in every way.*

Lord of mercy,
You have heard my cry;
Through the storm
You're the beacon,
My song in the night.
In the shelter of Your wings,
Hear my heart's reply, Singing
what a faithful God have I.

Lord all sovereign,
granting peace from heaven,
Let me comfort those who suffer
With the comfort You have given.
I will tell of Your great love
for as long as I live, Singing
what a faithful God have I.

*Robert & Dawn Critchley
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Intercessions: (Katie)

Nurturing God, who gave us an example of unconditional love, we give thanks for our parents, families and friends. Thank you for those who care for us, who sit by quietly, supportively and let us make our own mistakes, who are willing to forgive and encourage us.

Loving God, we pray for those who find Mothering Sunday a difficult day, those who have had difficult experiences of their mother or father, or whose family life is full of conflict, bitterness and recrimination, assure them of your love and bring them peace.

Empathetic God, we pray for those who find Mothering Sunday difficult because they have lost a child, or because they are unable to have much-wanted children. We pray for those who struggle to bring up children alone.

Loving God, whose son died on a cross, be with all those who need you and assure them of your love.

Caring God, we pray for those throughout the world who struggle because of war, famine and natural disaster. We pray for those who do not have enough water or shelter and those whose children die of starvation.

Generous God - Show us how to care and how to share. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: Our Father...

Hymn Singing the Faith 503

- 1 Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven,
to earth come down:
Fix in us thy humble dwelling,
All thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesu, thou art all compassion,
Pure, unbounded love thou art;
Visit us with thy salvation,
Enter every trembling heart.
- 2 Come, almighty to deliver,
Let us all thy life receive;
Suddenly return, and never,
Never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
Serve thee as thy hosts above,
Pray, and praise thee, without
ceasing, Glory in thy perfect love.
- 3 Finish then thy new creation,
Pure and spotless may we be;
Let us see thy great salvation,
Perfectly restored in thee;
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise!

Charles Wesley (1707-1788) Used By
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May God enfold you in a tender and lasting love. May Christ Jesus be beside you in times of struggle; and may the Holy Spirit guide you back to the path whenever you stray. May the blessing of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be among us and remain with us always. AMEN.

A woman is seen from behind, wearing a light-colored straw hat with a red band. Her arms are raised in the air, and she is standing in a field of bright yellow sunflowers. The background is a soft-focus green forest. The text 'HAPPY Women's DAY' is overlaid on the image. 'HAPPY' and 'DAY' are in white, bold, sans-serif font, while 'Women's' is in a yellow, cursive script font. There are several bubbles floating in the air around the woman's arms.

HAPPY
Women's
DAY