

# Morning Praise @ Home 10<sup>th</sup> March 2024

## Mothering Sunday

### Opening prayer

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and repent. Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin. Renew a right spirit within us and restore us to the joy of your salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**  
*cf Psalm 51*

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse *us* from *our* sins, and restore *us* in his image to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### Bible Readings

**Proverbs 31:25-29 2 Timothy 1:2-10**

### Reflection from Sue Coyne

#### THE NURTURING ROLE OF MOTHERING

From my mother, I inherited my green eyes and a certain way of holding my hand when relaxed. From my father I inherited low blood pressure. This always pleases medics when I go for tests, but the downside is that my feet very easily get cold – and when that happens, it stops me being able to sleep, or relax, or even to concentrate. Given that I am regularly sat at a computer for hours, this is not good news, but a heated foot mat has come to my rescue. It's usually only on for an hour, but that's enough to quietly cherish me as needed, and to nurture my ability to function as I undertake online tasks and communicate with others.

Being a Christian *isn't* just about the hour or so we spend in church each Sunday – it's about living out our faith and shining the light of Christ 24/7. But that period of coming together each week to worship and learn, to share and pray, nurtures us, allowing us to reach out to the world surrounding us because we have been, as it were, warmed through.

Mothering Sunday celebrates the nurturing, 'motherly' nature of the church, designed to be a place of security and warmth, of purifying and strengthening. The strengthening is important – the Sunday feast of word and song, of communion with God and one another, is not meant to be a heavy lunch that sends us to sleep, but a nourishing meal which gives us the nutrition we need to serve God's kingdom. As we declare at the end of our Communion Services: 'Send us out in the power of your Spirit, to live and work to your praise and glory.'

#### THE REPRODUCTIVE ROLE OF MOTHERING

But mothers don't just nurture and strengthen, they also reproduce. Taking Oscar each morning, I love how the exuberant joy of young lambs in the fields around us demonstrates the reproduction of fresh, new life. As early Christianity took hold through pagan Britain, communities of believers gathered together, who then sent out small teams to witness in new areas and form new Christian communities there. These in turn grew and sent out more teams to shine the saving light of Jesus into dark places. You see, like ewes in springtime, churches are intended to reproduce.

Today in the UK, the churches that are conspicuously growing are those who are doing the same thing: sending small groups of believers out from the security of their established church into new areas, where they plant a baby congregation to develop in a fresh environment. People who have never witnessed the love of Christ first-hand get to see it up-close and personal. The Messy Church model of engaging families with faith is another expression of the same reproductive 'mothering' and we need to pray for Amanda, Sarah and the team who are shining a light for Jesus, to which new children and parents in this area are being attracted.

Through history, the nurturing links with the sending communities were maintained, and many of these 'mother churches' in time became cathedrals, their oversight extending to hundreds of small groups of worshippers. Today we benefit from the care and oversight of our 'mother' diocese, as it provides Bishops, Archdeacons and Area Deans to turn to when things go wrong, as well as being there to guide and inspire when we need help.

But meanwhile, we too should be reproducing, not just new congregations, like our local Messy Church, but individual new believers. What does this look like in practice?

#### ACTIONS AND WORDS

In our reading from Paul's letter to Timothy, it is clear that young Tim's faith has been instilled and nurtured by both his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. Clearly they not only cared about the boy's physical well-being but were passionate about developing his spiritual growth.

This may not have been easy. It's likely that the family only heard the good news about Jesus just a couple of years before Timothy starts to work alongside Paul, so Lois and Eunice's own faith was quite young. What's more, Eunice wasn't married to a believer, which, in a patriarchal society, would have limited what she could do. But we read that her faith was sincere – not a shallow 'I only make time for God once a week' belief, or a showy 'People see me regularly attending worship' practice, but a true, heartfelt and honest commitment to Jesus.

I'm guessing that the women's faith was demonstrated daily in their every action – but that's not enough. It's vital that it is also actively talked about and taught. In praising a good mother, the passage from Proverbs mentions that <sup>26</sup> 'She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue.' Lois and Eunice probably didn't feel like they were experts, but they passed on what they knew – their heritage in the Jewish scriptures and their new understanding of the good news brought by Jesus.

Now, my mum belonged to an interwar generation who 'didn't like to talk about their faith' – but she could be sure that, in going to Sunday school, in RE lessons, through singing hymns at school as well as in church, her children would be exposed to the narrative of the Christian faith. *However, this is no longer true:*

- Kids in non-faith schools don't sing hymns;
- RE lessons are no longer focused on biblical understanding;
- Our culture doesn't regard sending children along to Sunday School as important.

If *we personally* don't talk to the next generation about what we believe, we can't assume that they'll hear it from anyone else. We are one generation away from extinction.

## OUR PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT

Those who don't yet know Jesus need *our* personal involvement. Alongside his mother and grandmother, Timothy was also nurtured by the prayers of the man who wrote this letter, Paul. He feels about Timothy as if he were his adoptive son and has clearly spent significant time in the young man's company. Even when apart, he regularly prays for him, and in our reading is writing to encourage him, recognising that Timothy has gifts to be developed.

Time together, individual encouragement, prayer – which individuals have each of you come across to whom you can give that? It may be someone within your wider family; it may be neighbours you've got to know a little; someone you've encountered through visiting or volunteering, or a work colleague.

- Please, write down their names and pray for them each week.
- Make time to be with them.
- Encourage them to recognise and develop their talents.

This Mothering Sunday reminds us how important it is to 'parent' non-believers towards committing their lives to God, or new Christians as they develop a baby faith towards maturity.

When John was a little boy, his Christian granny thought he should go to Sunday School, but frankly his non-church-going parents were too tired, busy and, really, not that bothered. But, every week, a member of the church running the Sunday School faithfully picked him up to drive him to it, then home again, until, many years later, John himself chose not to go any more. That man must have found John's decision upsetting – yet I am certain rejoiced when, seven years later, the now teenager *did* commit his life to following Christ.

Such 'Mothering' of others will take time, and may not bear immediate results, but anything that nurtures awareness of the light and victory offered by Jesus, that helps new life in Christ to be reproduced, is not wasted. Happy Mothering Sunday! **Amen.**

### **Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

**We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

### **Prayers of intercession prepared by Geoffrey and Anne Parsons**

On this special Sunday let us all give thanks for our families and friends:

for the blessings of home and family, for our friends and all who play a great part in our lives. Most of all today, we thank God for our mothers and for all they are or have been to us – for their caring, their guidance and their love.

We give thanks for the Mothers' Union here and around the world and for its dedicated commitment to home and family life.

There is a hymn – “God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform”.

Lord, we know there will be times of hardship and times of doubt. We know You will guide us through these times and bring us to a deeper understanding of your wonder and mystery.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

As we pray today, let us pray for those less fortunate than ourselves:

Those whose lives are overshadowed by war,

Those who experience hatred or distrust,

Those who live each day in fear,

Those who are homeless or who hunger for lack of food,

Those who are sick and those who have lost hope –

Please Lord, give them “Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow” for

“Great is thy faithfulness, O God our Father, there is no shadow of turning with Thee”.

Lord, give hope to all in distress for Great is Thy faithfulness, O God our Father.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you too for drawing us into God's family – the Church - through faith in you.

We thank you for the love we share, the care and friendship that we have been shown and the calling you have placed upon us to offer your love to those who are hurting, to pray for those who are bereaved,

and to share your saving love with any who are strangers to you.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

**The Lord's Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***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 today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

### **Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**