

Welcome to church, Jim, but not as we know it.

Today is Mothering Sunday; or mother's day; the day when normally families get together for lunch, and small posies of flowers are given out in church. Mothering Sunday goes back a long way; often the day when those who were working away from home returning to their community, or came along to mother church. Mothering Sunday 2020 in the midst of the coronavirus crisis means neither of these can happen.

In our service – you can find an order of service on the church website, if you haven't already been sent one – we shall be thinking about mothering, and there will also be an opportunity to remember our own mothers and those who have been like mothers to us, as well as praying for each other, our local community, and all those experiencing challenges at this difficult time. We worship a God who is with us wherever we are, and whatever circumstances we find ourselves in. This form of worship is an experiment, and there will be no songs or music, but spaces for reflection and silence. The order of service is from the Iona community in Scotland; celtic worship focuses on us being in community even though apart, and also is worship which roots us to place, and knowing that God is close by.

SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP

Call to worship

In the beginning
before time, before people, before the world began,
God was.

Here and now
among us, beside us, enlisting the people of earth for the purposes of heaven,
God is.

In the future,
when we have turned to dust
and all we know has found its fulfilment,
God will be.

Not denying the world, but delighting in it,
not condemning the world, but redeeming it, through Jesus Christ,
by the power of the Holy Spirit,
**God was, God is,
God will be.**

Prayer

Let us pray.
In you, gracious God.
the widowed find a carer, the orphaned find a parent, the fearful find a friend.

In you,

the wounded find a healer, the penitent find a pardoner,
the burdened find a counsellor.

In you,
the miserly find a beggar,
the despondent find a laughter-maker, the legalists find a rule-breaker.

In you, Jesus Christ, we meet our Maker, and our match.

And if some need to say, 'Help me'
and if some need to say, 'Save me'
and if some need to say, 'Hold me'
and if some need to say, 'Forgive me'
then let these be said now in confidence by us.

(silence)

O Christ,
in whose heart is both welcome and warning, say to us,
do to us, reveal within us
the things that will make us whole.

And we will wait;
and we will praise you. **Amen.**

Now we thank God for the gift of mothers and the mother-like nurture that many people show to us and to others. The response after each short time of silence is **Loving Lord, thank you for your tender care.**

Isaiah wrote that God is like a mother to us, comforting and carrying us in her arms.
'As one whom a mother comforts, so I will comfort you' (*Isaiah 66.13*).

Loving Lord, thank you for your tender care.

Isaiah also wrote that God would never forget us. He knows each of us, like a mother knows her own children.

'Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should have no compassion on the child of her womb? Even though these may forget, yet I will not forget you'
(*Isaiah 49.15*).

Loving Lord, thank you for your tender care.

David wrote that in God's presence, he was quiet and at peace, trusting his mother God like a child safe in loving arms.

'But I have calmed and quieted my soul like a child quieted at its mother's breast; like a child that is quiet is my soul' (*Psalms 131.2*).

Loving Lord, thank you for your tender care.

Jesus spoke of himself as a mother, longing to wrap his arms around us, like a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings.

'How often would I have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings and you would not' (Matthew 23.37).

Loving Lord, thank you for your tender care.

Paul writes about his missionary ministry and likens his work to that of a nurse who looks after those in her care.

'I was gentle among you like a nurse taking care of her children' (*1 Thessalonians 2.7*).

Loving Lord, thank you for your tender care.

I am now going to place a small posy of flowers on the communion table – let us pause to thank God for our mothers – maybe ones we might have been seeing today, but now cannot, and those who are no longer with us here on earth.

Lord God, we thank you for our mothers – as you are gentle, kind, loving and bring us your peace, so we give you thanks today. **Amen.**

Word of God

Reader:

Hear the word of God.

Our ears are open.

'How often would I have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings' (Matthew 23.37).

Reader:

This is the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

Sermon

That's probably the shortest bible reading you've heard - one verse, but I'll be reading a couple more as I focus on the next few minutes on mothering. But first a quiz. I'm going to read out a list of animals, and I want you to think about (or even say out loud – go on, no-one's listening) what their Baby is called – no, the answer is not 'fred'! e.g. I say 'goat' you say 'kid' – right, here we go.

Horse (foal)

Rabbit (kit)

Kangaroo (joey)

Magpie (cuckoo)

Duck (cygnet)

Those last two were a bit strange – the cuckoo lays its eggs in another bird’s nest – so it could well be a magpie raising a cuckoo chick. But what about the duck and the cygnet. Do you remember the story of the ugly duckling. It is raised by a duck, but then turns into a beautiful swan (all of you of a certain age have now got Danny Kaye’s version as an earworm, haven’t you?). In that bible verse I read Jesus says like a mother hen he wants to care for us – keeping us close to him in difficult times. The verse goes on to say ‘but you would not’. – it’s so easy to be so anxious in these troubled times that we leave no room for God. Just spend a few moments, maybe at the beginning, middle or end of the day in quiet reflection, opening your bible, praying to Jesus – allow him to be like a mother hen to you. I’ve send out some ideas for prayer and bible reading; if you are listening to this and haven’t had them, email the parish office - details on the website - and I’ll add you to our circulation list.

Our next passage of scripture is Luke 8:19-21 - 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.”

Jesus and those around him clearly were not keeping good social distancing measures, and as a result even his family couldn’t get to see him. That’s true for many of us at the moment. We may be missing seeing children, grandchildren, grandparents, friends. We are having to think of new ways of keeping in touch – some of us may even need to brush up on our writing skills and send a letter! But social distancing doesn’t mean we remain isolated. For those of us who call ourselves Christian, our brothers, sisters, parents and children are close by, even though we might be physically separated from them. Phoning, sending emails and other encouraging things are all signs that we are part of the family of God. I’m planning to phone a few of our church members each week over the next few weeks – normally people think I’m asking them to do something, though that’s never my intention, instead I’ll offer to pray for them and with them during the telephone call. I invite you to do the same, showing brotherly, sisterly, motherly love for each other at this difficult and isolating time. We need each other in ways we haven’t experienced before.

Our third bible reading is John 19:26-27 - When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing near by, he said to her, ‘Dear Woman, here is your son,’ and to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

It’s the scene so vividly portrayed in the stained glass window behind me here in St Mary’s Downe. Jesus is on the cross, and on one side and the other are his mother Mary and his close friend and disciple John. The Evie Hone window is a powerful scene. If you haven’t seen it, it’s available on the internet. Jesus allows his mother to carry on her mothering she’s shown to him with John, and John becomes Mary’s son. Mothering is something we share. If I were to ask you to list all the characteristics associated with mothering, it would be a long list. And no human being has them all – there are super mums, but no supermums!

The mothering that Mary showed Jesus was costly; the love Jesus showed to her the same. We are called to be God's holy people showing God's mothering love to our world. This week has been a surreal, hectic and challenging one. There's been panic buying in the shops, the schools are closed to most children, hospitals are getting overwhelmed. But there have been amazing signs of that mothering taking place, in our local communities as people offer help, care for each other, teachers and helpers commit themselves to caring for the most vulnerable children and children of those who serve us in so many ways. This costly love points us to Jesus – he is the source of all love. And for that on this Mothering Sunday we say 'thank you'.

We now spend time in prayer. At the end of each section of prayer as I say 'God of love' please respond 'hear our prayer'

As children of a loving God who always listens to our cries, let us pray to our Father in heaven.

God of love

Hear our prayer

Loving God, you have given to be called children of God. Help us to show your love in our home and communities in this time of crisis, that they may be places of love, security and truth. We pray for families who cannot be together today, and for those in our community bringing help to the needy (silence)

God of love

Hear our prayer

Loving God, Jesus your Son was born into the family of Mary and Joseph; bless parents and all who care for children; strengthen those families living under stress and may your love be known where no human love is found. We pray for those working in local schools as they look after children tomorrow and in the weeks ahead; we pray for those using foodbanks, and those caring for the homeless. We pray for all staff in hospitals, and in the other emergency and caring services. May they be kept safe and know your care for them. (silence)

God of love

Hear our prayer

Loving God, we thank you for the family of the church. We pray that all may find here a true home, that the lonely, the marginalised, and the rejected may be welcomed and loved in the name of Jesus. In the weeks that lie ahead when we can't worship together, may your Spirit unite us as we show love and care. Deepen our faith as we pray and read your word; we pray for church leaders-Bishop James and archdeacon Paul, and John in his role here at Cudham and Downe, and as he ministers to the clergy in the Orpington Deanery. We also lift to you those who are ill - we keep a moment of silence to mention them by

name. We also pray for the recently bereaved, especially for the family and friends of Rosemary Sharp and Don Reed. Be close to them at this time (silence)

God of love

Hear our prayer

Loving God, as we see the brokenness of our world we pray for healing among the nations; for governments and all those tackling Covid19; for food where there is hunger; for freedom where there is oppression; for joy where there is pain; that your love may bring peace to all your children. (silence)

God of love

Hear our prayer

We keep a moment of silence to pray for ourselves. (silence)

We end our prayers as we say 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.**

And even though we are not together in person, let's bring to mind one other member of our church community as we say...

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, evermore. Amen.**

Thank you for listening in to this church service today from St Mary's Downe. I hope you enjoyed it – if you're watching on facebook, feel free to add a comment. Please send me an email with any suggestions or prayer requests. This week's notice sheet is on our website too, or you may already have been sent it. Do have a read through and pray for each other, remembering that Jesus cares for us like a mother hen, that we are brothers and sisters in Christ and so can remain close to each other as we stay close to Jesus, and that he calls us to serve each other in motherly ways. And so to our closing responses:-

Closing responses

For all that God can do within us,
for all that God can do without us,
Thanks be to God

For all in whom Christ lived before us,
for all in whom Christ lives beside us,
Thanks be to God

For all the Spirit wants to bring us,
For where the Spirit wants to send us,
Thanks be to God

Listen, Christ has promised to be with us
in the world as in our worship.
Amen. We go to serve him.