

Swaythling Parish

Sunday 14 March 2021

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Mothering Sunday

Welcome

Below is a service sheet for you to use at home. You can also find our Sunday morning reflection on YouTube channel, available at 10am on Sunday, (and afterwards). Please search for "Swaythling Parish" on YouTube to find and view it.

*If we can support you in any way at the present time, or you would just like to chat, do please get in touch: 023 8055 4231
peter.dockree@outlook.com*

Introduction from Rev Peter Dockree

Welcome to our service today, however you are joining us. This Sunday is the fourth Sunday of lent, a time of reflection, and is also Mothering Sunday, a celebration that is both deeply joyful and holds pain and challenge to many too.

Greeting

Grace mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you

And also with you.

The Lord be with you,

And also with you

Prayer of thanks and confession

(filmed at St Mary's Church)

Apart from being flowers that we give out in normal years to every woman who comes to church, daffodils are flowers with so much symbolism behind them. It always feels good when they start appearing in the supermarkets every year, a reminder that spring is coming. As we stand amongst the daffodils this morning, we remember all that we have to be thankful for. For those who have mothered us. For our mother church. For family and friends. For the beauty around us.

Alongside the joy comes the regrets and challenges too. Let us just take a moment to own those now, knowing that we are loved and forgiven.

May the God of love
Bring us back to himself,
Forgive us our sins,
and assure us of his eternal love
in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect for Mothering Sunday

God of love,
passionate and strong,
tender and careful:
watch over us and hold us
all the days of our life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Hymn: Love Divine.

1. Love Divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven, to earth come down,
Fix in us thy humble dwelling,
All thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, 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 light 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 let us 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!

C Wesley (1707-1788)

Readings

Exodus 2:1-10

Birth and Youth of Moses

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. "This must be one of the Hebrews' children," she said. Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water.

Luke 2:33-35

Simeon and Anna

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

A Reflection by Rev Peter Dockree

Mothering Sunday is one of those days that causes both deep joy and deep pain to people. Memories of mothers who are no longer with us, a joyful time to celebrate those who have mothered us in all sorts of ways, for some painful thoughts of difficult or even abusive relationship with mothers. It is a day where some feel deeply thankful for the gift of being a mother or of having a loving mother, and where others are reminded of what could have been and was not. It is a day that a clergy you are so aware of the need to both sing it from the rafters and also for many to recognise that it can be a day that we wish would pass quickly. Of course mothering Sunday in its history is a celebration of the mother church, something which has sadly also often been far from perfect.

The biblical models of motherhood are not purely the joyful happy celebrations but are

layered with nuance and challenge. Mothers like in our first reading who had to give up their child to keep them safe while another took it upon herself to look after them. Mothers who like Mary would have to watch as her own child faced great sacrifice. Of course, there are joyful stories too, those who thought they would never be a mother finding themselves giving birth.

A quick look at a card shop (when we can go again!) at this time of year, reminds us that there is a perfect ideal of a mother, an ideal that is often far from realised. Whether we are physical mothers or are involved in the love or care of another, love is never simple. It carries with it deep joy and deep pain. In St Albans we are linked with a mental health charity in Nigeria called Amaudo (look out for details of a quiz coming up for Amaudo). In Amaudo they are profoundly aware of both the joys and sorrows involved in love and last year there was a story involving a mother who was found by the project. Sarah is going to tell that story now:

Esther was living in Lagos, Nigeria with her husband and they were both overjoyed when they discovered she was pregnant with their first child. As the time for the birth drew nearer, they returned to their home in the SE of Nigeria so that they could be supported by family members during the birth and in the early weeks of their new baby's life.

When Esther gave birth to a baby boy there

was such joy and celebration – but as the days went by, this turned to sorrow, as it became clear that Esther could not care for their new baby. On one occasion, she even tried to harm him. Thankfully, family were able to care for the baby while we tried to understand what was wrong with Esther.

Esther's mother in law took her to a so called prayer house because the family suspected there was a spiritual problem that they believed could affect women after childbirth – she stayed there for two days but instead of getting better, on her return she was more distressed and even less able to care for the baby. It was not long before she abandoned the baby altogether and wandered away from the home. She lived rough on the streets for about a week before Amaudo workers found her and took her to Amaudo where her mental health was properly assessed, and she was given medications and support to help her recover.

As she began to recover, she remembered that she had delivered a baby but she felt really worried about going home. During a review session with the psychiatrist and other staff she was able to give her father's mobile phone number to the staff which ultimately resulted in her father visiting her at Amaudo. He explained how the entire family had been looking for Esther everywhere and had even reported to the Police that she was missing.

When Esther's husband was informed she was at Amaudo, he had never heard of it and knew nothing about it. When he finally arrived and saw his wife he could not believe that she was alive. He had spent so long travelling the streets and the bush searching for her. It was a warm reunion with tears of joy. It was not too long before he was able to take her home to their baby son. Because she was now mentally stable, Esther was able to care for him in the way she needed to.

Many women across the world experience postpartum psychosis. In Nigeria because of a lack of information many husbands and family members regard it as "ogbanje" or "ukeh", a spiritual sickness, and as a result some women are abused, abandoned or divorced. Esther's husband, believes Amaudo saved Esther and their new-born child, and that it saved him from accusations and suspicion. He has committed to caring for and supporting his wife now that he understands what was wrong and they remain happily married and raising their son together.

Mothering Sunday is a day to reflect on both the joys and the sorrows of love. The sacrifices that others have made for us. Recognising the times when the perfect model has not been true for us, but also knowing that we are loved and held with those times.

Prayers

Let us pray for our world, our community and those in need around us. You may wish to light some candles as you pray, and remember mothers or those who have mothered us who are no longer with us in person.

For the moments of brokenness and despair. For the moments of light and possibility. For the people battling to survive either physically or emotionally. For those who fear a "return to normal". For the promise of vaccines and timelines out of lockdown. For business desperate for custom to return, and those whose jobs rely on this.

For places of darkness and places of light, in our own country and across the world. For politicians and those who would govern us. For the national church and the challenges it faces to be your hands and feet.

For the season of lent, its opportunities and its challenges.

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

Amen

Hymn: O love that wilt not let me go.

- 1 O Love, that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.
- 2 O Light, that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to Thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in Thy sunshine's blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be.
- 3 O Joy, that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to Thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain
That morn shall tearless be.
- 4 O Cross, that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from Thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms
red
Life that shall endless be.

George Matheson (1842-1906)

Closing Blessing

Thank you to everyone for worshiping with us today.

May this season be for you a time to face
the things that we struggle to face,
A time to meet God and to learn afresh
how we may follow God.
A time to count our blessings, and
experience the power of grace.

May the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
be among us and remain with us always.

Amen

Songs reproduced under CCLI Licence No 159376. Streaming Licence No 101226. Scripture quotations from NRSVA version of the Bible, © 1989, 1995.