

## Circuit Written Service 10<sup>th</sup> March 2024 – Mothering Sunday by Revd Steph Jenner

### Lent liturgy (object: a globe)

Unbounded God, we thank you for this wonderful world and breathtaking universe that is our home. Lord Jesus, we place this globe at the cross to remind us that you love the world and will save the world. Holy God, finish then thy new creation.

The word John uses for the world is 'kosmon,' from which we get the English word 'cosmos'. In our understanding, and in other parts of the New Testament, it encompasses the whole of creation rather than just our human society, or even just our planet. The word literally means 'ordered system', where everything is in its right place. God sent Jesus so that the cosmos might be saved, brought back into order once more. God's love is not bounded to the small-scale things we notice; it has a cosmic scope. "Finish then thy new creation, perfectly restored in thee": we know that we and this messy but beautiful universe are loved by God and we look forward to the time when everything that is broken will be fixed.

### Verse 2 of Love Divine (StF 503)

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.



*Charles Wesley*

### Hymn StF 608

All praise to our redeeming Lord,  
who joins us by his grace,  
and bids us, each to each restored,  
together seek his face.

He bids us build each other up;  
and, gathered into one,  
to our high calling's glorious hope  
we hand in hand go on.

The gift which he on one bestows,  
we all delight to prove;  
the grace through every vessel flows,  
in purest streams of love.

E'en now we think and speak the same,  
and cordially agree;  
concentred all, through Jesu's name,  
in perfect harmony.

We all partake the joy of one,  
the common peace we feel,  
a peace to sensual minds unknown,  
a joy unspeakable.

And if our fellowship below  
in Jesus be so sweet,  
what heights of rapture shall we know  
when round his throne we meet!

*Charles Wesley*

### Prayers of Praise and Confession

On this Mothering Sunday we give thanks and praise for our positive experiences of mothering – of having a mothering figure when we were growing up and being a mothering figure as we become older ourselves. We offer our praise that God chose Mary as the mother of Jesus, that he was able to be nurtured as an infant, instructed as a child, guided as a young adult, and loved his whole life. And we bring praise that Jesus himself was not beyond showing mothering qualities himself as we are told in Matthew and Luke's gospels when talking of Jerusalem: "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a mother hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing." For all the Biblical examples of mothering and our own experiences, we praise and adore you, loving God.

But we also confess that our lack of compassion and empathy can cause us to deride mothering, to belittle it, to ridicule it, to cast judgement over how others mother, to be too ready to jump in and take over, rather than encouraging and helping from afar, offering advice only when asked, but also giving practical help, without criticism. Help us to not fall into the trap of knowing better, and turning away when things become difficult. Tempt us not to idolise mothering, but to be realistic to the problems and possibilities. Forgive us when we have not been, thought or done our best for our children and God's children and help us to be absolved when Jesus says 'Your sins are forgiven'. And we pray through Jesus name, Amen.

Lord's Prayer – please pray whichever version you prefer.

### Introduction

In this country Mothers' Day and Mothering Sunday have been brought together which can cause confusion. So, while we may celebrate, or not, Mothers' Day, today we will explore Mothering Sunday. Mothering Sunday is a day honouring mother churches, the church where one is baptised and becomes "a child of the church". It has been celebrated since the Middle Ages in the United Kingdom, Ireland and some Commonwealth countries on the fourth Sunday in Lent.

### Readings Exodus 2: 1 – 10

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 he became her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

### John 19: 25b – 27

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

### Hymn StF 729

Touch the earth lightly,  
use the earth gently,  
nourish the life of the world in our care:  
gift of great wonder,  
ours to surrender,  
trust for the children's tomorrow will bear.

We who endanger,  
who create hunger,  
agents of death for all creatures that live,  
we who would foster  
clouds of disaster –  
God of our planet, forestall and forgive.

Let there be greening,  
birth from the burning,  
water that blesses and air that is sweet,  
health in God's garden,  
hope in God's children,  
regeneration that peace will complete.

God of all living,  
God of all loving,  
God of the seedling, the snow and the sun,  
teach us deflect us,  
Christ reconnect us,  
using us gently, and making us one.

Shirley Erena Murray

## Reflection

Every year I send my mum a Mothering Sunday card, and they become increasingly difficult to find as most shops only stock Mothers' Day cards, unless they are a Christian card seller. But when I think about – should I be? If Mothers' Day is about mothers and Mothering Sunday is about Mother Church, have I got it wrong? Except that it was my Mum who took me to church, with Dad to be baptised and then from aged 2 to Sunday School where she taught one of the older classes. So perhaps, for me, they are synonymous. And I can no longer return to my Mother Church as it no longer exists as a church although the building is still there, now residential flats. But there have been other churches that I have called home over the years, scattered around the country, so maybe they should also be thought of today. The church where I was baptised is also the church where I was confirmed, but it's not the church that I was married in, either time, nor the church that accredited me as a local preacher, nor the one from which I candidated to become a minister – they are five different churches, but each, for me is a type of going home, returning to a significant time in my life, a place where I was nurtured and mothered.

So maybe today we remember the going home places, even if we cannot physically get there any longer for whatever reason, but perhaps we can go in our minds, to those churches and communities where we felt safe, loved, and heard. Where we were able to grow and learn, to ask questions and find ourselves before God.

In our Old Testament reading from Exodus we have the story of Moses as a baby, a child who grew in the safety and security of two very different homes and situations, but loved and nurtured in each. Firstly with his birth mother who did everything she could to keep him alive in a chaotic and dangerous time, but ultimately was able to nurse him and teach him for those earliest of months in secret and then, joyfully, openly. Secondly with his adoptive mother who gave him all the advantages of growing up in a privileged household, with all the learning opportunities it gave him. When Moses is fully grown and called by God, he reconnects with his birth family, and comes home to fulfil his role for his original people.

In our New Testament reading from John's Gospel, Jesus knows that his death is immanent, and although he is resurrected, he won't have an earthly home for much longer, so he instructs his disciple to take Mary to a new home, but it will be one where Jesus is known, loved and spoken of often, so she, even in her grief, will have somewhere to be safe and comfortable. But it is more than just a new place to be, Jesus gives her a new son and the disciple a new mother, an adoptive mother, because he understands how that role needs to be fulfilled, by both parties.

When we look at this world on Mothering Sunday, we realise just how many people need the security or a safe place to be, where they can thrive and flourish, where they can be authentically themselves without fear. We know it is beyond our human capabilities to mother the whole world, so on this Sunday, of all Sundays, we offer ourselves to God, to be used as is seen fit, to mother where we can, with as much love and openness as we can muster, to whoever comes into our churches, our communities and our lives.

## Hymn StF 120

We gladly celebrate and praise,  
the gift so great and good,  
through which God's kindness is made  
known:  
the gift of motherhood.

We sing of Mary's mother-love:  
for she, of all on earth,  
received the privilege to bear  
and bring God's Son to birth.

We pray that God's own mother-love  
will hold in gentleness,  
all children who have never known  
a mother's tenderness.

For mothers, who with broken hearts,  
are faced with grief and loss,  
we pray the Son of God will give  
deep comfort from his cross.

We trust the mother-love of God,  
who bears, in Mary's boy,  
our pain and sorrow, to secure  
our everlasting joy.

### Prayers of Intercession

Between each verse of the following hymn, please take a moment to think on and pray for the people the words bring to mind.

#### Hymn StF 746

For all the saints who showed your love  
in how they lived and where they moved,  
for mindful women, caring men,  
accept our gratitude again.

For all the saints who loved your name,  
whose faith increased the Saviour's fame,  
who sang your songs and shared your word,  
accept our gratitude, good Lord.

For all the saints who named your will,  
and saw your kingdom coming still  
through selfless protest, prayer and praise,  
accept the gratitude we raise.

Bless all whose will or name or love  
reflects the grace of heaven above.  
Though unacclaimed by earthly powers,  
your life through theirs has hallowed ours.

John L Bell & Graham Maule

#### Hymn StF 82

O Lord my God when I in awesome wonder  
consider all the works thy hand hath made,  
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,  
thy power throughout the universe displayed.  
*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to thee,  
how great thou art, how great thou art!*  
*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to thee,  
how great thou art, how great thou art!*

When through the woods and forest glades I  
wander  
and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;  
when I look down from lofty mountain  
grandeur,  
and hear the brook, and feel the gentle  
breeze;

And when I think that God, his Son not  
sparing,  
sent him to die - I scarce can take it in,  
that on the cross my burden gladly bearing,  
he bled and died to take away my sin;

When Christ shall come with shout of  
acclamation  
and take me home – what joy shall fill my  
heart!  
Then shall I bow in humble adoration,  
and there proclaim, my God, how great Thou  
art!

Carl Gustaf Boberg alt Stuart K Hine



### Blessing

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. Amen