

Circuit Service 15th March 2026 – Lent 4 – Mothering Sunday

Written by Revd Steph Jenner

Lent Liturgy

This week's symbol is a bottle of water, representing the miracles of Jesus. At Cana Jesus turned everyday water in jars into vast quantities of fine wine. It was the first sign in a ministry that included many extraordinary miracles. Many people representing the old hidebound ways objected to Christ's offerings of Living Water.

Sing: Verse 1, StF 654

The love of God comes close
where stands an open door
to let the stranger in,
to mingle rich and poor.

*The love of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk his way.*



Prayer: **Transforming God, who can take loaves and fish and feed a multitude, who can calm a storm at sea with two words, teach us to trust in your wisdom, love and wonder. Amen**

Call to worship: Ephesians 5: 8 – 10

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord.

Hymn StF 17

With gladness we worship, rejoice as we sing,
free hearts and free voices how blessed to
bring;
the old, thankful story shall scale thine abode,
thou King of all glory, most bountiful God.

The right would we give thee – true homage
thy due,
and honour eternal, the universe through,
with all thy creation, earth, heaven and sea,
in one acclamation we celebrate thee.

Renewed by thy Spirit, redeemed by thy Son,
thy children revere thee for all thou hast done.
O Father! Returning to love and to light,
thy children are yearning to praise thee aright.

We join with the angels, and so there is given
from earth alleluia, in answer to heaven.
Amen! Be thou glorious below and above,
redeeming, victorious, and infinite Love!

George Rawson

Opening Prayers

Great God of all love, we come into your presence today
as people in need of your loving embrace.

We recognize that our independence of spirit,
and our desire to make our own way in the world,
have sometimes taken us far from you;
and we acknowledge the many ways
that we have pushed you away.

We are sorry for those times when we have turned our faces
away from your loving gaze.

So today, trusting in your unconditional acceptance,
we open our lives to the light of your love;
and we ask that you will forgive us those dark places
in our souls and in our lives

where we have tried to keep you out, and ourselves hidden.
Help us today to hear you calling us once again,
speaking words of love, forgiveness, and acceptance.

Amen.

Lord's Prayer – please pray whichever version in whatever language you prefer

Introduction to Reading

Before the passage below Jesus heals a man born blind. The people are amazed, but the local authorities are not happy and demand to know from his parents that he was truly born blind and this was not some sort of trick, especially as blindness, and any disability, was seen as a sign of sin either on the part of the person themselves, or their family.

Reading: John 9: 24 – 34

So for the second time [the Pharisees] called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, 'Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.' He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?' Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.' They answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out.

Hymn StF 349

I am not skilled to understand
what God has willed, what God has planned;
I only know ay his right hand
stands one who is my Saviour.

I take him at his word and deed:
Christ died to save me; this I read
and in my heart I find a need
of him to be my Saviour.

That he would leave his place on high
and come for sinners once to die –
you count it strange? So once did I,
before I knew my Saviour.

Yes, living, dying, let me bring
my strength, my solace from this spring;
that he who lives to be my King
once died to be my Saviour.

That he would leave his place on high
and come for sinners once to die –
you count it strange? So once did I,
before I knew my Saviour.

Dorothy Greenwell and Aaron Shust

Reflection

Expectations versus reality is increasingly difficult in this day and age, especially when things we see are manipulated by clever technology, and things we hear are often only the loudest voices filtered through another's bias. We honestly do not know what is real and true without a lot of searching, researching and confirmation from multiple sources.

In our Gospel reading, despite the lack of modern obfuscation, the Pharisees want to be absolutely sure that what they are being told about the man born blind is not a lie, or a trick. Their own bias, held alongside many of the time, is that blindness was a punishment from God, for an historic and often unknown sin. They could not conceive, therefore, that this could be healed, apart from by an unlikely forgiveness directly from God, and that was their own purview, not a wandering, unlikely, unproven, troublesome man from Galilee, with his ragtag band of followers, whom they clearly think is a sinner himself.

And in a further comparison with life today, when repeated questioning didn't get an answer they liked or could tolerate, the Pharisees drove the formerly blind man away, rather than change their minds.

Changing minds is an incredibly difficult things to do. It can take years, decades, to change peoples' attitudes, especially to ideas they grew up believing. And although having opinions and beliefs contrary to modern world in itself is not an issue, expressing them out loud to people to deliberately cause them upset is not on. It's bullying, it's harassment, it's hate, and it's not acceptable. I grew up in the early seventies and eighties when feminism really started to take off and I had excellent examples in my own family of women who sought equality for themselves and for their daughters and granddaughters.

Women used to be considered only as homemakers and mothers, and if you could not be the latter, for whatever reason, you were seen as something lesser, incomplete. And while I am sure we are probably all grateful for our mothers, we didn't necessarily have to follow in their footsteps, we had choices that they didn't.

So on Mothering Sunday, we think of those who mothered us, and those whom we mothered, whether they were family, friends, or church. And we thank God for the changes brought in over the years that have allowed all of society to exercise the mothering roles, or not, if that is not their natural inclination. And we are grateful for those who came before and asked the awkward questions and didn't take being fobbed off for an answer.

May God bless you on your continued journey, wherever it make take you, and whoever travels with you, and may the truth guide you, shining brighter than loudness and lies. Amen.

Hymn StF 134

Christ, whose glory fills the skies,
Christ, the true, the only Light,
Sun of Righteousness, arise,
triumph o'er the shades of night;
Day-spring from on high, be near;
Day-star, in my heart appear.

Dark and cheerless is the morn
unaccompanied by thee;
joyless is the day's return,
till thy mercy's beams I see,
till they inward light impart,
glad my eyes, and warm my heart.

Visit then this soul of mine;
pierce the gloom of sin and grief;
fill me, radiancy divine;
scatter all my unbelief;
more and more thyself display,
shining to the perfect day.

Charles Wesley

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

We pray especially for all who find Mothering Sunday painful:

We pray for mothers who watch over children who are ill
and children who watch over their suffering mothers;
We remember mothers who are apart from their children
and mothers who grieve because their children have died.
For those who longed for children and who have none
For those without their mothers because of illness or death
And who, in their longing, know themselves to be alone;
For children who are abused or neglected,
For children missing their mothers on this day

And all who suffer the impact of family breakdown
We ask that you would be a light in the darkness.
Tender and compassionate God
surround us all in your loving embrace;
and hold us always in your care.

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

We commit our struggling world and the conflicts that spoil our relationships into your hands of love.
For people we know who are sick and for those close to death,
We ask for peace.
For all who offer us love and compassion
And nurture us into growth and wholeness
we give you thanks.
May we walk more faithfully with Jesus
and follow him, as Mary did,
to the foot of the cross
and onwards into the light of resurrection hope.
In the company of one another and of all the saints in glory
May we gaze on Jesus, the light of the world that will never be overcome.
Amen.

Hymn StF 479

The King of love my shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his
and he is mine for ever.

Where streams of living water flow
my ransomed soul he leadeth,
and where the verdant pastures grow
with food celestial feedeth.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed
but yet in love he sought me,
and on his shoulder gently laid,
and home, rejoicing, brought me.

In death's dark vale I fear no ill
with thee, dear Lord, beside me;
Thy rod and staff my comfort still,
Thy cross before to guide me.

Thou spread'st a table in my sight,
Thy unction grace bestoweth:
and O what transport of delight
from thy pure chalice floweth!

And so through all the length of days
Thy goodness faileth never:
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
within Thy house for ever.

Henry Williams Baker

Blessing

May the blessings of light be upon you,
Light without and light within,
And in all your comings and goings,
May you ever have a kindly greeting
From them you meet along the road.

