

The Parish of
Saint Helen's Tarporley
Saint John's Cotebrook
Saint Thomas' Eaton



**Welcome to our Sunday Service at Home
though apart we worship together**

22nd March 2020 Mothering Sunday

Prayer of Preparation

**Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said: The first commandment is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength'. The second is this: Love your neighbour as yourself'. There is no other commandment greater than these. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Amen. Lord, have mercy

Prayers of Penitence

And knowing that we sometimes forget these commandments we say:

**Most merciful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
we confess that we have sinned in thought, word and deed.
We have not loved you with our whole heart.
We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
In your mercy forgive what we have been,
help us to amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be;
that we may do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with you, our God.**

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon us, pardon and deliver us from all our sins, confirm and strengthen us in all goodness, and keep us in life eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord **Amen**

Today's Collect may be said here

God of love, passionate and strong, tender and careful: watch over us and hold us all the days of our life; Amen

The Liturgy of the Word

First Reading

Exodus 2: 1-10

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. ²The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him for three months. ³When 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. ⁴His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

⁵The 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. ⁶When 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. ⁷Then 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?' ⁸Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Yes.' So the girl went and called the child's mother. ⁹Pharaoh'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. ¹⁰When 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.'

Gospel Reading

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. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' ²⁷Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

Sermon

Written by Rev Julian Osborne

I suspect that for many of us, Mothering Sunday this year will be very different to previous years. No dining out, no going out for a drink or to a show or the cinema. Quite possibly no physical contact at all, for "social distancing" has entered our vocabulary as a rule to follow for what might be months ahead. Most years I scour the shops for a card which celebrates Mothering Sunday rather than its relatively new incarnation, Mother's Day. This year, I took the executive decision to buy a card from the most convenient shop I could find (social distancing again) and all I could find was one that said "Happy Mother's Day". My Mum will disapprove, but hopefully the present will make up for it!

She disapproves because she knows that today was never meant to be solely about mothers. She knows that its original meaning was more about mothering. In this country, the day itself grew out of the medieval tradition of visiting the mother-church and taking an offering for presentation at the altar there. The fact that this was done at the mid-point of Lent made it something of a welcome break in the penitential season. It was only in Victorian times that this was developed into the custom of sons and daughters who lived and worked away from home joining their families for the day, and bringing small gifts for their mothers.

So, today is a unique day in the year to give thanks for mothering itself, perhaps for 'Mother Church', for our own mothers and indeed for anyone who has mothered us. But we have to acknowledge that this is a day some people will find very difficult. For some women – and men too – this day underlines their silent, personal griefs and sorrows. Quiet tears will be shed by many on this day. Tears for children who have died, tears for children who have rejected their parents, tears for the relationships that never happened, tears for the children that never were. There will also be tears for mothers who have loved and been loved and are now sorely missed. All in all, a day of mixed emotions, inevitably heightened by anxiety around Covid 19. These emotions are real and need to be acknowledged. Today's Gospel resonates deeply with the themes of pain and suffering.

We see Mary, Jesus' mother at the foot of the cross, watching her beautiful baby boy die. It is easy to forget that she was a teenage girl, pregnant before her marriage; forced into a long journey on the back of a donkey in the last stages of that pregnancy; compelled to flee with her betrothed and the baby as refugees to a foreign land. Hardly the stuff of chocolates and roses. This was a woman acquainted with suffering and hardship, but surely nothing could compare with this scene as Mary waited at the foot of the Cross and watched the awful agony of her dying son. Surely this is where the iconic nature of Mary finds its truest expression, and her mother's love becomes an icon for all our loving. She teaches us that love is vulnerable, that it suffers, that it takes risks. If we didn't love, if we couldn't love, then those painful realities that upset the equilibrium of our lives – rows, viruses, sickness, death, loss, broken relationships – all these would matter far less to us. But we do love, and so they hurt acutely.

Mothering Sunday, placed so near to Holy Week, reminds us that a relationship, any relationship, without pain is likely to be a relationship without love. In fact, if we love, then we put ourselves in the very path of pain and suffering. To love is to put yourself at risk, and your heart will sometimes be wrung, sometimes broken. But we can't wish it any other way, for we are made in the image of a God of love, and love, real love, costs – it is a very expensive commodity, and sometimes we may have to pay for it with the currency of our tears.

Today we know that the Cross proved to be the place of victory, and that after the apparent defeat of death came new life. So if we want resurrection, if we want new life in our own lives and our relationships, then we must be prepared for the way of the Cross, because resurrection by definition can come only by way of risk, pain and suffering. The love of Jesus and the love of Mary both teach us that the only sort of loving and the only sort of living worth having are those which will take risks, which will place themselves in the path of suffering. Mothering Sunday is a day to honour and celebrate all those who have provided mothering – in its widest sense – both women and men. All those who have been companions, who have influenced, supported, nourished and guided their charges.

Today's very brief gospel brings together the themes of mothering and the passion of Jesus. It is an intensely moving episode as Jesus hangs on the cross, his mother and John, the beloved disciple, the only male in the scene, close by. The supposedly strong people – the other male disciples – had deserted him, and he was left with a handful of grieving women who, despite the awfulness of what they were witnessing, remained steadfast and faithful

to the end. We can scarcely comprehend the emotional and psychological pain Mary must have felt as her son died before her eyes. Jesus takes this moment of agony to say something profoundly important. To his mother he says, 'Here is your son', and to his close friend, 'Here is your mother'. In other words, you have a responsibility to nourish and care for one another. What binds Jesus's followers together more than just blood ties is the recognition of one another's humanity and the need both to give and to receive love. This is a whole new way of relating to one another and it finds its origin and expression in the God whose very nature is love. It has often been said that, in this moment, a new way of being family is born. A new way of being church family was born.

We who seek to follow Jesus today are blood relatives - not through our blood but through his, shed on the cross for us all. His mother Mary and his best friend John formed the church in their relationship with each other. They offered one another comfort. They strengthened each other. They encouraged one another. They met each other's needs.

Yes, the virus may well involve us living through difficult, even harrowing, days. Let us, like Mary and John, have the courage to stare death in the face and not be dismayed, but instead to hear Jesus words of love and support. Let us not hesitate, let us not falter, but instead let us love each other and forge something new and beautiful from adversity.
Amen

Prayers of Intercession

Loving God, for mothers who have cherished and nurtured us; for fathers who have loved and supported us; for all who have loved and cared for us and for whom we love and care: and for all who have helped to draw us into the family of our Father in heaven:
Lord in your mercy hear our prayer

Loving God we give thanks for your family – the Church. Equip and protect all who follow you that together we may share your love and message of hope and comfort. We pray for all who cannot meet together in worship, all living in isolation and all who feel alone. Help us now, more than ever, to be good neighbours to each other.
Lord in your mercy hear our prayer

Loving God, we pray for those for whom Mothering Sunday is a time of heartache rather than celebration, for those who long to be parents, for those who have difficult relationships with their parents or children, for those who no longer see their parents and all those who are currently separated from family members
Lord in your mercy hear our prayer

Loving God, we pray for all those who suffer in mind body or spirit and particularly those affected in any way by Covid-19. We give thanks for our emergency services and all who work in health care professions asking you to protect, encourage and bless them. In a moment of silence we bring you the concerns on our own hearts.....
Lord in your mercy hear our prayer

Loving God, we remember with thanksgiving the lives of those who have died and pray for all who mourn. May we with them know the truth and power of your promise of eternal life and love and the comfort and hope that brings
Lord in your mercy hear our prayer

We join all our prayers, those said here by us and those said by our congregation scattered in this Parish, together in the prayer that Jesus taught us: the Lord's Prayer

**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.**

May God, who gave birth to all creation, bless us:

May God, who became incarnate by an earthly mother, bless us:

May God, who broods as a mother over her children, bless us.

May almighty God bless us, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
now and for ever. Amen

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. Amen.