

WINCHESTER, EASTLEIGH & ROMSEY CIRCUIT

Service at Home

for Mothering Sunday 19th March 2023

prepared by the Revd John Archer

A "Health Warning"

An absurd practice has developed such that if anything slightly contentious is written then the reader has to be warned in advance. In this service which centres on a mother (Jochabed) it is to be understood that the mothering function can be undertaken by either gender and by people who are not the biological parent. A lot of people will have lost their mothers some time ago so it might be helpful to you if, in addition to 'thanks for the memory,' you focussed on an existing mother you know, whom you could support in your prayers.

Call to Worship

God of compassion throughout history you cherished your people, bending down in love & teaching us to walk in freedom. We worship you.

Jesus our brother in your human life you welcomed children and made them a sign of the coming of the Kingdom. We praise you.

Holy Spirit wild wind brooding over all creation, you are the midwife of our longings. We wonder at your works.

Read pray or sing StF 134

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjB_bKGhkM4

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, radiance divine;
scatter all my unbelief;
more and more thyself display,
shining to the perfect day.

Charles Wesley (1707- 1788)

Prayers

We thank you for those who perform the role of mother in our society whoever they are - for all they mean or have meant to us; for the love they have shown and the care they have given;

for the dedication that they show, the sacrifices they make, the support they offer and the guidance they provide.

We thank you loving God for this day of saying thank you, for this opportunity to say what we so often mean to say but rarely do; for mothers and motherhood, for children and families we bring you this day our grateful praise, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Bible Reading: Exodus 2: 1 – 10

Read or pray STP 616

Lord, in our lonely hours,
and when our spirit faints,
we are encouraged by your life,
and by your saints.

If we've no breath for praise,
no thoughts to frame a prayer,
we know you need no words of ours
to prompt your care.

If in excess of pain,
or grief, we stammer why?
It comforts us that on your cross
this was your cry.

Yet, in serenest faith,
transforming Calvary,
you trusted in the Father's love --
and so must we.

Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000)

Prayers for Others

We thank you for your great and never ending love, which never stops seeking us out.

Today we pray for those who feel unloved, whose relationships have been broken through separation, divorce or bereavement.

For those who have never enjoyed the relationship that they might have had – children unwanted by their parents, parents alienated from their children, family members estranged from one another.

Lord, in your mercy reach out in love.

We pray for individuals who feel rejected by society, have no confidence, no place where they feel accepted, have no sense of their own worth.

We pray for communities divided by prejudice, race or religion. and for nations broken by war and natural disaster. We especially remember families in Ukraine, some of whom have found safety in our country but where most struggle to keep together and alive. We think too of similar terrible situations for families that exist in disaster areas of Turkey and Syria.

Lord in your mercy reach out in love.

Almighty God bring friendship to the lonely, reconciliation to the estranged, harmony to the divided and comfort to the bereaved.

Lord in your mercy reach out in love and, where it is within our power, may we be part of the outreach. In the name of Christ we ask it. **Amen**

Read, pray or sing StF 611

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQaOErUUjm8>

Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey,
and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you
in the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping;
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow
till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.

Richard A. M. Gillard (b. 1953)

A Silly Story

A little boy had to write an essay on birth for school, so he asked his mother "Mum how was I born?" "Well dear," she answered somewhat hesitantly, "When we wanted a little baby, we asked God for one and a stork came down and left you on our doorstep." He then asked his grandmother, "Granny how was mummy born?" Grandma looked embarrassed and said "We asked God for a baby and the next morning we looked out in the garden and there was your mother, a little baby lying under the gooseberry bush". "And what about you grandma, Were you born in the same way?" "I was", she said. Then the lad went off to write "In the last three generations there have not been any natural births in our family".

Introduction

Many people will say that childbirth and parenthood is no joke! Parenthood is often painful. We bring pain at our birth and usually painful sorrow at our death. Any love has its pain but most mothers would say the pain of childbirth is of a different order. And it does not stop there. Ask Jochabed the mother of Moses featured in our lesson. She put him in a basket to save him from his enemies. Ask the same of Mary and Joseph who fled from the soldiers in Bethlehem who wanted to kill their son. In both of those stories a mother suffers great heartache because of her son. But it is also a time of great joy. The TV series about midwives shows this well. In all those circumstances of poverty and huge families and even babies born as a result of prostitution, the initial reaction to the birth is one of joy. For many, in spite of difficulties and problems this joy continues.

Yet there are many parents in our world (and our country), as in the time of Moses, where the joy at birth all too soon turns to worry and sorrow. So let us briefly look at our story and see what lessons we can draw from it.

Jochabed was the mother of Moses and features nowhere else in the story – but her influence in the Bible was tremendous. These were dark days in Egypt for the captive Hebrew slaves and many felt the sting of the whip on their backs. There was a concern by the Egyptian authorities that a much higher immigrant birth rate could destabilise the regime. Uncomfortable echoes

now heard in communities in our country about the huge number of boat people and illegal immigrants. At that time pressure on the Government led to the extreme measure of killing all Hebrew baby boys. But for one family a thread of faith kept the hope alive and so Moses' mother hatched a plan to keep him alive which was remarkably successful.

We learn 3 things from Jochabed - **Her Faith**

She kept her baby and hid the crying for three months with the guards daily passing her door and everything pointing to the destruction of her race. All over the world today there are mothers and older siblings (fathers have been called to fight) struggling to save their children. There must be a lot of Jochabeds in Ukraine and in some African countries at the moment. They desperately seek safe shelter or, in Africa, walk miles to find food or water and they rejoice when they survive and grow. As we think of our own children and grandchildren today let us not only give thanks but also pray and give aid that other children may live. Perhaps more than ever mothers and fathers need to have faith that their children will withstand the evils that they face.

Her Hope

She was hoping against all odds that Moses would be saved for a life of service to God. This was a hope borne out of faith', not in her own scheming and planning but, in the power of God to save and keep. She holds out hope when things seem hopeless. Even today when things seem to go disastrously wrong in families, it is a mother's love that children cling to. A surprising number of teenage suicide notes contain the phrase "I'm sorry mum". Jochabed kept her hope alive and so must we.

Her Love

Love involves pain and suffering as with Jochabed when she committed her son to the uncertain place in the river rushes. Every mother has to lose her child sometime. For some it is cruelly in bereavement, where the pain of love is continued in memory and dates. For the majority, the day comes, as some of you will know, when they don't tell you what they are thinking. For some the sullenness, the secrecy and silences, have to be patiently suffered. A child must achieve independence if he or she is to achieve responsible adulthood. To undergo this sort of 'separation' needs the quality of love. In John

3:16 we read that '*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son*'. In Gethsemane Jesus endured the pain of separation from his Father for the love of us.

So we have **Faith Hope and Love**.

Where have we heard these three terms gathered together before? They are in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (Chapter 13) - they are often part of the Wedding Service. A mother (and a father!) show these qualities when she (and he) carry out their marriage vows. **Amen**

A poem for Mothering Sunday written by Rev. Fred Pratt Green, our fine hymn writer. Read prayerfully before we end the service.

How great the debt we owe
To those who love us most.
They give us birth and help us grow,
And rarely count the cost.

To make us feel secure
They lose their life in ours
And what they mean to us is more
Than we can say with flowers

How can we measure love?
Yet treasure it we must,
For what God gives us from above
Is held by us in trust.

Then let us vow today
As those who know love's worth,
To love, to worship, and obey
The Lord of all the earth

Read pray or sing StF 81

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLjJBFIXRO>

Now thank we all our God,
with hearts and hands and voices,
who wondrous things has done,
in whom this world rejoices;
who from our mothers' arms
has blessed us on our way
with countless gifts of love,
and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God
through all our life be near us,
with ever joyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us;

and keep us in his grace,
and guide us when perplexed,
and free us from all ills
in this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God
the Father now be given,
the Son, and him who reigns
with them in highest heaven,
the one eternal God,
whom earth and heaven adore,
for thus it was, is now,
and shall be evermore.

Martin Rinkart (1586-1649)
translated by Catherine Winkworth (1827-1878)

Blessing

Whoever you are, wherever you go,
whatever your strengths,
whatever your weaknesses,
God will be with you,
to hold, to heal, to guide and to bless.
Go then in peace, assured of his love.

Amen

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Acknowledgements

*Some prayers are amended prayers from "Prayers
for All Seasons" by Nick Fawcett*

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