



Heacham Parish Church



Sunday Service 14th March 2021 - 4th Sunday of Lent or Mothering Sunday

3 verses of 'For the beauty of the earth' played by Adrian and sung by Jean.

The traditional words for v3 relevant to Mothering Sunday ('For the joy of human love...')

*For the joy of love from God,
that we share on earth below;
for our friends and family,
and the love that they can show;
Father, unto you we raise
this our sacrifice of praise.*

The tune is 'Mersey garden' written by Adrian for his Methodist choir to join with an Anglican and RC choir to celebrate the opening of the Liverpool International Garden Festival in 1984.

Grace mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you; **and also with you.**

As we gather in our homes, together yet apart, we meet in the presence of God, so let us come together to be God's people.

Traditionally today is a time to celebrate our mother churches, those people and places which have nurtured our faith. But for many this time comes with painful associations with motherhood, feelings of inadequacy or loss. Yet in Christ, we are given both comfort and family. We have come together today to give thanks to God for all those people who have nurtured us, and to offer ourselves to nurture others, with God's help. We have also come to acknowledge the pain of a hurting world, where we have failed to nurture each other. We come to receive again all that we need from the God of compassion and mercy.

Prayers of confession and absolution

Prayer of Preparation

Loving, compassionate Father,
As a mother hen gathers her chicks,
so you draw the whole human family to yourself.
Bring us together now, Lord,
that we may today and forever be united under your wing
in all our sorrows and joys.

All **Amen.**

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.

All **Amen.**

Song: **To God be the glory**

sung & played by Sue, Judith, Richards C and G, Hilary, and Lesley

To God be the glory!
great things He hath done;
so loved He the world
that He gave us His Son;
who yielded His life
an atonement for sin,
and opened the life gate
that all may go in.

*Praise the Lord, praise the Lord!
let the earth hear His voice;
praise the Lord, praise the Lord!
let the people rejoice.
O come to the Father,
through Jesus the Son
and give Him the glory;
great things He hath done!*

O perfect redemption,
the purchase of blood!
to every believer the promise of God;
the vilest offender who truly believes,
that moment from Jesus
a pardon receives.

Praise the Lord.....

Great things He hath taught us,
great things He hath done,
and great our rejoicing
through Jesus the Son;
but purer, and higher,
and greater will be
our wonder, our rapture,
when Jesus we see.

Praise the Lord.....

Bible Reading: John 3: 14-21 read by Lois

A Reflection by Pip Lawrence

Let's pray. Father thank you for your word. Speak to us now, we pray, as we think about your message. For we ask in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Although the verses from John 3 are the Evangelists 'go to' passage to preach on, they are less 'go to' for a Mothering Sunday. John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son...." is part of our Christian DNA. We will all be able to recall, repeat or paraphrase the verse, which is like a manifesto of our faith. Indeed, in pre-pandemic times I have seen the verse on many a Spring Harvest T-shirt. So, what is there to say, as I'm guessing that we have engaged with this service today as paid up, invested, and involved members of the church of Jesus Christ our Lord. Where can we go on this Mothering Sunday, in the strange land of lockdown number three, with a year of strangeness, upset, sadness, and separation behind us?

Well, as I think of formative women in my life, I want to recall a saying often used by one of them - "Count your blessings". The first blessing

that comes to mind is a love of the word. Scripture has been a constant source of blessing to me throughout my Christian life. I love that it speaks to my heart in all situations. I love its deep wisdom. I love its humour and its constancy. I love that it unites us all, whether we know it deeply or only dip our toes into it.

So, from the springboard of blessings let's look at what some of these verses tell us about our God this morning. V 14-15 "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." For me, and maybe for you too, these verses speak deeply of two things. Firstly, the blessing of our creator God's desire to draw people of his creation to Himself, and of his willingness to participate in the mechanics of enabling this to happen. Secondly, the blessing of the presence of an ever-loving God that stretches from before the exodus to beyond the cross to countless generations. Our Father is completely invested from the beginning to the end. Throughout the earth's history we can trace the presence of God engaging with the world He loves as His plan unfolds. That includes today, in the ravishes of a pandemic, and all previous pandemics that there have been.

Let's look at V16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life". God is for us, He is a loving Father, who was and is willing to go to extremes to display His love for us. What a blessing. Let's never get used to that. Let's always stand in awe and wonder that the creator God who spoke, and the earth came in to being; loves us all deeply, widely, and beyond our ability to comprehend. He loves us all so much that He provided the solution to the gulf, His son Jesus, that separated His creation from Himself. Jesus died on a cross to bring healing, hope, redemption, and love to a world that had turned its own way. When we are down, struggling and in despair, these are blessings we need to remind ourselves of. We are "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God".

Let's remember that we are blessed, that God did all this despite what it says in verse 19. "This is the verdict; Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness because their deeds were evil". God's action proves beyond doubt that He is love because Jesus died for us while we were

still sinners. The Lord still calls us today, despite knowing what is in us, isn't that staggering?

So, the blessings we acknowledge today are God is love, God is for us, God provides solutions, and God presides across history. God intervened in history and still calls us to follow Him. That is who He is, and amazingly we are loved by Him, that is who we are. Count your blessings today because God loves you, God cares about you, God is involved in your story and God welcomes you.

Happy Mothering Sunday brothers and sisters in Christ wherever you are.
Amen.

Prayers of Intercession, led by Judith and Terry

Heavenly Father, we come before you now, aware of all our failings during the past week and in need of your mercy, forgive us the times we have not done your will and prepare us now for the coming week ahead.

This we ask in your precious name, **Amen.**

Heavenly Father, as our children make a phased return to their schooling, we pray that they'll adapt quickly and re-establish friendships that were put on hold during the various forms of lockdown. For the teaching and support staff, we pray that they'll receive the necessary guidance and help, ensuring the transition will run smoothly, relieving the anxieties of both teachers and their pupils.

This we pray in your precious name, **Amen.**

Lord, we pray for our Queen and the royal family, as once more they're in the spotlight with family difficulties being brought into the public domain. We pray that the strong family unit will be upheld and not further divide opinions.

Lord, remind us now of the need to be a part of a loving family, let us not judge others lest we also be judged, let us not be an open ear to gossip, but a loving confidant to those who give us their trust.

Let us see the good in others, just as you Lord, seek only to rejoice in our acts of kindness to others and where there is a need to resolve a conflict, may your Holy Spirit move and pour out its blessing on all.

This we pray in your precious name, **Amen.**

We pray for our government and their efforts to steer us through the pandemic that has affected everyone. May the decisions now being made, shorten the time towards a return to a more normal way of life and allow us to meet as Your Church once more.

This we pray in your precious name, **Amen.**

We pray today for all those who are suffering with illness, loneliness or finding life difficult. Let them feel Your love surrounding them and give them hope. We pray for those mourning today. Let Your love fill the emptiness and bring comfort.

Thank you for our mums and children and for all family life. Today is a day to say 'thank you' for all that our mothers do and have done for us. We thank them for the patience, love, and guidance they have given us. But it can also be a day of sadness for some.

Be close to those who have never known their mother or whose mothers have died.

Be close to those who long to be mothers but as yet have not had their own children.

Be close to those who struggle with the way their children have chosen to live their lives.

Be close to those who have or had a difficult relationship with their mothers.

Be close to those who are sad because they are far apart from those they love.

Be close to those who have lost a child.

Give to all those with the responsibility of motherhood patience, love, guidance, and the joy of those moments that children bring with their love of life.

Let Your love be in every home and help your church to hear and see the needs of others and meet those needs in a way that is sensitive and loving. We pray You will answer these prayers in Your way and Your timing. **Amen**

We pray together the Lord's Prayer: led by Michelle

Song: For God so loved the world

sung, signed & played by Terry, Karen, Kaitlyn, Veronica, Shona, Colin, Rosie, Lynda, Lesley, and Hilary

For God so loved the world
that He gave His only Son;
and all who believe in Him
shall not die,
but have eternal life;
no, they shall not die,
but have eternal life.

And God showed His love for you,
when He gave His only Son;
and you, if you trust in Him,
shall not die,
but have eternal life;
no, you shall not die,
but have eternal life.

Closing prayers

Great God, you are one God,
and you bring together what is scattered
and mend what is broken.
Unite us with the scattered peoples of the earth
that we may be one family of your children.
Bind up all our wounds
and heal us in spirit,
that we may be renewed as disciples of Jesus Christ,
our Master and Saviour.
And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.
All Amen.

Adrian plays Organ – Allegro – from Suite in D by J. Stanley

A happy, optimistic tune for Mothering Sunday - and what can be more optimistic than today's reading John 3:16 - insofar as its composer - John Stanley 1713-1786 – was accidentally blinded at home at age 2. Nevertheless he, Stanley at age 14 , (according to Charles Burney – sometime organist at St Margaret's King's Lynn) was appointed to a major London Church, and subsequently to the Temple Church where Handel is said to have dropped in to hear him playand maybe pinch a few ideas!

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