

# 10<sup>th</sup> March 2024 – Morning Service

## Lent 4 – Mothering Sunday

Tina Gittings

### Lent Liturgy - The Whip

#### **Mark 15: 6 – 15: Jesus Before Pilate**

*Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.*

*"What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them.*

*"Crucify him!" they shouted. "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate.*

*But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!" Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged and handed him over to be crucified.*

Lord Jesus, you were flogged. We pray for those being persecuted, even killed, for their faith; be with them, grant them your strength, and peace at the last. We take a moment to think about the persecuted church, particularly in Nigeria, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Iraq and China. We ask God to strengthen them and let His presence be known to them. We give thanks for organisations and individuals who are seeking to bring peace and understanding between different faiths. Lord Jesus, enlarge our view of your body so that we, as you, suffer each time another member suffers, and cause us to be watchful and active on behalf of our brothers and sisters who are denied a voice. **Amen.**

### StF 88 – Praise to the Lord the Almighty

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| 1) Praise to the Lord, the Almighty,<br>the King of creation!<br>O my soul, praise him, for he is thy<br>health and salvation!<br>All ye who hear,<br>Brothers and sisters, draw near,<br>Praise him in glad adoration.         | 4) Praise to the Lord, who, when darkness<br>of sin is abounding,<br>Who, when the godless do triumph,<br>all virtue confounding,<br>Sheddeth his light,<br>Chaseth the horrors of night,<br>Saints with his mercy surrounding. |
| 2) Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper<br>thy work and defend thee;<br>Surely his goodness and mercy here<br>daily attend thee:<br>Ponder anew<br>What the Almighty can do,<br>Who with his love doth befriend thee.           | 5) Praise to the Lord! O let all that<br>is in me adore him!<br>All that hath life and breath, come now<br>with praises before him!<br>Let the amen<br>Sound from his people again:<br>Gladly for aye we adore him.             |
| 3) Praise to the Lord, who doth nourish thy life and restore thee,<br>Fitting thee well for the tasks that are ever before thee,<br>Then to thy need<br>He like a mother doth speed,<br>Spreading the wings of grace o'er thee. |   |

*Joachim Neander translated by Cathering Winkworth & Rupert E Davies*

## Prayers of Praise and Confession

Father God, we bring our praise and worship to you the Creator of all. We see the cool clear light of the moon causing the frost on trees and plants to sparkle and shine. We feel the warmth of the sun on our faces and see its bright light dispelling gloom and darkness and we rejoice in the beauty of your world. We see mighty mountains soaring to the skies their peaks hidden in the clouds. We know of the vast seas and mighty rivers, deserts and jungles all these you created and we praise you. We wonder at the variety of your world and rejoice in its beauty. We worship you as our Creator, the One who loved us into being, who likened his love for us as being greater than a mother's love for her child. We praise you that you created us to live in love and friendship with you and with each other, to live in harmony with your world and to enjoy and respect its beauty and riches.

And we confess that we have let you down, we do not look after and respect your world your creation as we should. We exploit its riches and destroy its beauty for our own ends. We do not love each other as you want us to. We disregard people's needs if there is conflict with our wants. We are unkind to our friends and families, taking their love for granted as we so often do yours. We ignore the plight of those we do not know, forgetting that you created us to love and care for each other. Father, forgive us.

We thank you for parents, families and friends who love and understand us but most of all we thank you for your love. You know us better than we know ourselves you see our faults and failures and still you love us. We thank you that you gave us your Son Jesus Christ so that we may learn to love and live together in your world. And that in learning to love each other we may learn to love you more and in doing so bring honour and glory to your name. We rejoice that through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ we are able to be your children. In his name we bring our prayers to you. **Amen.**

Our next hymn is God of Eve and God of Mary. We always associate Eve with the apple and temptation. We forget that she was the first mother and would have suffered the pain and sorrow of having a son murdered by his brother.

### StF 119 – God of Eve and God of Mary

- 1) God of Eve and God of Mary,  
God of love and mother-earth,  
Thank you for the ones who with us  
Shared their life and gave us birth.
- 2) As you came to earth in Jesus,  
So you come to us today;  
You are present in the caring  
That prepares us for life's way.
- 3) Thank you that the Church, our Mother,  
Gives us bread and fills our cup,  
And the comfort of the Spirit  
Warms our hearts and lifts us up.
- 4) Thank you for belonging, shelter,  
Bonds of friendship, ties of blood,  
And for those who have no children,  
Yet are parents under God.
- 5) God of Eve and God of Mary,  
Christ our brother, human Son,  
Spirit, caring like a Mother,  
Take our love and make us one!

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### Reading: Exodus 1:22 & 2:1-10

Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live." Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said. Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?" "Yes, go," she answered. So the girl went and got the baby's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So the woman took the baby and nursed him. When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water."

### **Reflection – Who has mothered us?**

In our reading we heard of the women who gave of themselves to save the life of a baby. The mother who defied the might of Egypt to save his life, his sister who watched and intervened to protect him, and a princess who ignored her father's order to save the child and nurtured and educated him.

Let us take a moment to reflect upon those who have loved us and still love us, those who set us on the right path, perhaps made sacrifices in their own lives to benefit us.

### **StF 615 – Let love be real**

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| 1) Let love be real, in giving and receiving,<br>Without the need to manage and to own;<br>A haven free from posing and pretending,<br>Where every weakness may be safely known.<br>Give me your hand, along the desert pathway,<br>Give me your love wherever we may go. | 2) Let love be real, not grasping or confining,<br>That strange embrace that holds yet sets us free;<br>That helps us face the risk of truly living,<br>And makes us brave to be what we might be.<br>Give me your strength when all my<br>words are weakness;<br>Give me your love in spite of all you know. |
| <i>Ch) As God loves us, so let us love each other:<br/>    With no demands, just open hands and<br/>    space to grow.</i>  | 3) Let love be real, with no manipulation,<br>No secret wish to harness or control;<br>Let us accept each other's incompleteness,<br>And share the joy of learning to be whole.<br>Give me your hope through dreams<br>and disappointments;<br>Give me your trust when all my failings show.                  |

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### **Reading: Luke 2:33-35**

The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

### **Reading: John 19:25-27**

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

## Sermon

Before the 20th century some children left home to seek work at a very young age and visits home were few and far between. Quite often Mothering Sunday was the exception. It was a tradition that people returned home to worship at their Mother Church and in doing so would meet up with families and friends. Employers often allowed girls in their service to make a cake to give to their mothers. This would have provided a little welcome relief from the fasting of Lent and also from the normal restricted diet of poor families.

A few years ago, I was due to lead a family service at Amblecote Wordsley for Mothering Sunday. The congregation from New Road had joined with Amblecote Wordsley whilst their church buildings underwent renovation works. As a result, there was quite a large junior church. In the weeks before I spent time with the junior church to find out what we could make instead of cake. They thought long and hard and came up with...a friend. What a great gift to anyone but to a mother so special. Someone to let off steam with, to moan at, to share sorrows and fears, to laugh and joke with, to be able to let your hair down and be comfortable with. I went to the junior church to find out what they thought were the ingredients needed to make a friend. Sugar and spice and all things nice definitely, snips and snails and puppy dogs well perhaps not. That's what the nursery rhyme says makes girls and boys but we all know that making a friend is more complicated than that. Our young people gave the matter a lot of thought; love and laughter, falling out but not for long, caring, sharing not just the smiles and laughter but the tears, trying to be nice even when they have upset you, not shouting at you when they are angry. The list went on, I was so proud of them for their wisdom and understanding. They were able to teach us all a thing or two. I was most impressed with the need to BE BRAVE.

Sometimes we need to be brave for our friends whether it is standing up to bullies at school or work or challenging unfairness and injustice on their behalf. Sometimes we need to be brave to tell our loved ones that what they are doing is harming them. And sometimes we need to tell them that they are hurting us; they have said or done unkind things; they have ignored us and left us out. Sometimes we just worry about them because we love them and we don't want them to come to any harm but we know that if we try to stop them, we will be spoiling their enjoyment of life so sometimes we just have to be brave and let them get on with it.

When I first became pregnant with my daughter, I was told by the local wise women which every community seemed to have at one time - now you will never know what it is like not to worry. And guess what she was right. Mary the mother of Jesus had to be brave right from the beginning. She gave birth in a stable and she and Joseph had to flee to Egypt and live in exile to protect Jesus from Herod. And as Jesus grew to manhood and began his ministry when the mutterings and opposition began and grew stronger how many times must she have reflected in the words spoken by Simeon. In our reading from Luke, she was warned of this and of her own suffering with the words *"And a sword will pierce your own soul too"*. And yet she was there to encourage and comfort him. It was she who persuaded him to turn the water into wine at the wedding feast overcoming his reluctance, starting him on his way to the cross. And she was there as he died in agony on the cross.

I have been reading a book set in the twelfth century by G Lawrence about a young woman who has all the world can give but is desperate for a child. Seeking solace in a nunnery she prays before a painting of Mary when the angel Gabriel appears to tell that she has been chosen to bear the Son of God. This is what she writes: *"Mary was drawing back, afraid of the apparition, of the power and trust being placed in her. I wondered if she was shrinking, modest, as men thought her, or if she had seen the wealth destiny held for her, and wondered if she could be enough, enough to carry such joy and sorrow; if she could love a child so deeply and surrender him to death, for the good of the world. Hers was a sacrifice deep and painful, yet she never turned her back on the world of man when man killed her child. In Mary was the awesome power of which love was capable. The best that women are capable of, that mankind is, is when we hold others up"*

How brave. How brave for Mary and her friends supporting her to be at the foot of the cross as her son died. This week we have seen the mother of the murdered Russian opposition leader challenging and defying the power of Putin to bury her son with dignity. How brave. The Son Mary had nurtured how brave was he? He came to earth knowing that in order to save us he had to suffer. He made powerful enemies when he challenged injustice and yet he carried on. He upset people when made them think about their behaviour, the truth can hurt. Even his friends were not above being confronted by him. And yet he was a man made vulnerable by love he cried when he heard of the death of his friend Lazarus. It was to the cross that Jesus the man went to suffer the ferocious cruelty that man can inflict on man and in his words from the cross we hear words of love and concern, not only for his mother ensuring her safety and protection, so precious to him he gave into the care of a disciple, but also words of comfort for the robber crucified at his side. Words of forgiveness for the world, "*Father forgive them for they know not what they do*".

Jesus died so that we could be freed from the power of sin and live in friendship and love with God through him and his sacrifice. There is a saying, friends are relatives you chose for yourself. Jesus offers his friendship to all if we take up his offer, we become brothers and sisters through him one family the children of God. As a family we say together the prayer 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.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

### **StF 594 – Lord Jesus Christ**

1) Lord Jesus Christ,  
You have come to us,  
You are one with us,  
Mary's Son -  
Cleansing our souls from all their sin,  
Pouring your love and goodness in;  
Jesus, our love for you we sing,  
Living Lord.

4) Lord Jesus Christ,  
We would come to you,  
Live our lives for you,  
Son of God;  
All your commands we know are true;  
Your many gifts will make us new;  
Into our lives your power breaks through,  
Living Lord.

3) Lord Jesus Christ,  
You have come to us,  
Born as one of us,  
Mary's Son -  
Led out to die on Calvary,  
Risen from death to set us free;  
Living Lord Jesus, help us see  
You are Lord.

## Prayers of Intercession

These prayers are prompts with spaces between for your reflections and thoughts.

Loving Father, we pray for your hurting world. We pray for those caught up in war and conflict, for those who do not know the whereabouts of family and friends who fear that they are dead. We pray for the people of Ukraine and Russia caught up in an ongoing war causing death and destruction, the separation of families and appears to have no end. We pray for the people of Gaza fleeing death and destruction. We pray for the people of Israel fearing for the lives of their loved ones held hostage. Give peace and comfort to them; wisdom, compassion, and the will to seek a resolution, to their leaders

[Silence]..... Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer**

We pray for those who are unhappy and in distress, are grieving and sad today. For families torn apart for so many reasons. We pray for all who are separated from their loved ones whether through distance, misunderstanding or bereavement. We pray for parents who cannot provide sufficiently to meet their children's needs, who are unable to nurture and keep safe their children, unable to pay for medical care or schooling. We pray for children who are unwanted and unloved, who live by their wits and are drawn into lives of crime in order to survive. Give to them, Loving Father, we ask hope, comfort and courage to look forward to a happier future.

[Silence]..... Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer**

Loving Father give to us the determination and resilience to do your work in the world, to seek justice and peace, to share love and caring in whatever way we can.

[Silence]..... Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer**

We ask that all may feel the strength of your support and the warmth of your love and know themselves to be your children through your Son and our friend and Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen**

Our last hymn is Mary's song of commitment and joy on hearing the news from Gabriel that she is to bear the long-awaited Messiah.

## StF 186 – Tell out my soul

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| 1) Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!<br>Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;<br>Tender to me the promise of his word.<br>In God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.             | 3) Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!<br>Powers and dominions lay their glory by;<br>Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,<br>The hungry fed, the humble lifted high. |
| 2) Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!<br>Make known his might, the deeds his arm<br>has done<br>His mercy sure, from age to age the same;<br>His holy name - the Lord, the Mighty One. | 4) Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!<br>Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.<br>Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord<br>To children's children and for evermore!         |

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## Blessing

With Mary's words in our hearts, a mother who loved unto the end and beyond, we face the world, knowing her Son is with us always. May the blessing of God Almighty the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit be upon you and those whom you love for ever. **Amen.**