

Colchester Methodist Circuit

Mothering Sunday 22nd March 2020

Welcome to this service of worship. These are strange days. Coronavirus has impacted us and our communities more than we have been able to imagine. We find the prospect of not being able to gather with friends not together painful and difficult. We love being in our Churches and it feels wrong not being together. We enjoy sitting amongst our friends and many of them are lifelong friends aren't they?

We have so many shared memories and they are truly precious.

It's worse on a day like today maybe because being Mothers Day we want to be together and we want to spend time with our families and friends.

Yet we are people of faith and hope in Jesus and know that often quoted verse where Jesus talks to his friends in Matthew 18:20 (NRSV)

20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

We often trot that out when there are just a very few people gathered in a large building to make us feel better, but today I think that verse takes on a different richer meaning. We are gathered together in many different places across this Colchester Methodist Circuit and indeed across the world. And God is here with us, by the power of His Spirit binding us together and uniting us as we worship and pray together. I hope you really feel that enfolding of the Spirit of God because 'God is here as we His people meet to offer praise and prayer.'

And so let us pray

Loving God we are feeling strange today, meeting in our homes and not our beloved Churches. We have all sorts of worries and concerns about this process of self isolation and how long it will last. We are fearful about many things and many friends and relatives

Pause

Yet as we gather together like the hymn writer of old we say in the face of this virus and the panic and despair we see around us 'But this I know'

That You our Great Creator are with us.

But this we know, that You will never leave us.

And this we know, that You love us with such a passion and shower us with grace and mercy.

Oh God we love you. Embrace us now as we worship, unite us by the power of your Holy Spirit and breathe your peace into every troubled breast this day. We come seeking hope and assurance, we come needing to know that we are not alone.

So be with us as we worship and enfold us in your love we pray.
Amen

StF 24

*Come, now is the time to worship.
Come, now is the time to give your heart.
Come, just as you are to worship.
Come, just as you are before your God, come.*

*One day every tongue
will confess you are God,
one day every knee will bow.
Still, the greatest treasure remains
for those who gladly choose you now.
Come, now is the time to worship ...*

Brian Doerksen (b. 1965)

We share a short time of silence

Great Creator, Beautiful and loving,
passionate and strong, holy and wise;
we are here to praise you.

Kind Mothering God,
Always patient and caring, watching over us;
and we are so grateful for Your love.

We offer you now the praise of our humble thankful hearts
Be with us as we worship.
Guide us by the power of your Spirit

In the name of Jesus we pray
Amen.

We say together the Prayer Jesus gave us saying, 'Our Father ...
The Lord's Prayer

Talk #1 - The Mothering of Home and God

Home is a word that means many different things for us all. Some of you will have had a good childhoods - great relationships and wonderful memories. For you Mothering Sunday, Mothers Day, is a day that fills you with thankfulness and joy.

Sadly that is not true for all of us. Some listening or reading this have not such positive memories to hold on to, and seeing all those Mothers Day cards year after year in the shops can be really difficult.

Today we remember the Mothers in our lives, the good and the average, the loving and those who were less than they should have been.

The origins of this Mothering Day are that it was a day for those in service to return to their Mother Church, and we still hold that as a treasured memory for some of us; the Church that raised us, schooled us, loving us often into the faith that has sustained us all these years.

Yet again it would be wrong not to acknowledge that some people in our time of worship have had really quite negative experiences of Church not being loving or kind place.

Yet on this Mothering Sunday beyond the love of mums and moms and churches and chapels, we recognise we all have another home and another Mother who will NEVER let us down. God our Mother who is always there, always loving, always seeking to enfold and wrap us up in love. That is not just for us who go to Church, that for all humanity; created and loved by our God.

Today then we have so many reasons to worship and praise God;
for our Mothers, our families and friends who have mothered us
through our lives;
for the Churches and Chapels who have nurtured and loved us;
for the NHS and all those working so hard in these difficult days'

Yes we have so many reasons to praise God for her presence here with us and the loving kindness and grace that has held us all the days of our lives, even when we were not even aware that God was there.

Hopefully if you watching this on the YouTube channel you will now hear a newer hymn by Matt Redman 10,000 reasons.

If you are following this on the notes the words are here - like lots of modern songs they can be a bit repetitive especially when written out! Yet I think

they are really relevant and needed for today. I hope they will be a blessing to you.

*Bless the Lord O my soul, O my soul
Worship His holy name
Sing like never before, O my soul
I'll worship Your holy name*

*The sun comes up
It's a new day dawning
It's time to sing Your song again
Whatever may pass and whatever lies before me
Let me be singing when the evening comes*

*Bless the Lord O my soul, O my soul
Worship His holy name
Sing like never before, O my soul
I'll worship Your holy name*

*You're rich in love and You're slow to anger
Your name is great and Your heart is kind
For all Your goodness I will keep on singing*

10,000 reasons for my heart to find

*Bless the Lord O my soul, O my soul
Worship His holy name
Sing like never before, O my soul
I'll worship Your holy name*

*And on that day when my strength is failing
The end draws near and my time has come
Still my soul will sing Your praise unending
10,000 years and then forever more*

*Bless the Lord O my soul, O my soul
Worship His holy name
Sing like never before, O my soul
I'll worship Your holy name*

If you are following this worship on the handout notes I want to offer a more traditional hymn too, so from Singing the Faith 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!*

Fred Kaan (1929–2009)

Talk #2 - The Mothering that is raw and painful

The Bible doesn't pull any punches; the hard and difficult sit side by side with the easier and more joyful, and so it was for Naomi in the book of Ruth. Naomi is the mother of two boys, and suddenly her husband dies. As time passes the lads grow and eventually they both marry - one of Naomi's daughter in law's was called Ruth. The Book of Ruth in the Old Testament part of the Bible tells us that they enjoy life for about 10 years then both sons die.

Ruth 1:20

- 20 "Call me no longer Naomi,[a]
call me Mara,[b]
for the Almighty[c] has dealt bitterly with me.
- 21 I went away full,

but the Lord has brought me back empty;
why call me Naomi
when the Lord has dealt harshly with[d] me,
and the Almighty[e] has brought calamity upon me?"

We can appreciate how Naomi must have felt because the shock of grief and the pain of disappointment is just as hard for us to bear as it was for her.

Parting is as Joyce Grenfill wrote hell.

It is a sorrow and loneliness that cuts us deeply, and so it is today on Mothering Sunday that we simply must think of those who have been cut off from their children or grandchildren, or from the dream of having children of their own.

We think today of those who are mourning this weekend those who have died, family and friends whose death has torn away something within them and left a hole they are not sure we can live with.

Pause

I think grief is kind of like the taste in your mouth you get when you bite into a fresh sour and very bitter lemon; it stays long after on the taste buds doesn't it. So it was for Naomi and all humanity when death drags us to a place that is as hell to us - not dying, but trying to deal with living on in the grip of dreadful grief.

Time might pass but the rawness doesn't does it, we just get used to the pain and loss.

So it is in a way for all of us across not just this wonderful town of Colchester but our nation and much of the world. We have been cut off from the things that make our lives meaningful and joyful. We have lost out on long made plans and are being forced to come to terms with the fact that life doesn't look like it will be normal for a long time. We are living with a sour taste in our mouths and we do not even know when can spit it out and rinse out the taste.

God doesn't take away the pain or airlift us out problems, but our Creator does always stand with us bringing hope even in those places where there is only despair. That was the testimony of Naomi by the end of the small book of Ruth. It has been true for those like Naomi who have had to tread terribly lonely paths throughout time. It will be true for us and our world through this crisis . . . even if at times it is hard to see where or how I pray you will have just enough, just a small sliver of faith to keep on holding onto.

I pray that you will come to know that God is there with us even these strange days and if we look for it there will be a light burning and calling us to a brighter day,

In Jesus name
Amen

Intercessions

In these strange and unique times we need you Lord God who weeps with us in our pain and agony, to pour your oil of love on our troubled waters. Pour out your Spirit upon all those who are scared and traumatised.

We pray for all who are seriously ill in hospitals or at home. That your gentle Spirit would be so present with them and their loved ones that they might know your peace enfolding them.

We pray for those who have died, and all those who mourn. God our loving and compassionate Mother walk with us and shine light into the deepest most difficult times. Without you our burdens are just too heavy to carry; so gently lift us up and weeping with us lead us on.

We pray for all who are really struggling to see hope and are full of fear. We pray for a real sense of community and love for one another to overtake us all in this great Nation, that we might learn how to care for one another and make sure that no one is left isolated or alone; that we might leave behind the selfish hoarding that we have seen so much of in these last weeks.

For those who feel trapped because they have to stay within their homes, give to each the powerful assurance that you are with them, and that they are not forgotten by so many in the world outside the door.

In these strange days we lift to you great Creator God the NHS and all who work so courageously and bravely, especially we pray for nurses, Dr's, researchers, porters and all on the front line.

We pray Mothering God for all in authority in our Nation and around the world, that they might know how to lead us; give to them the wisdom they need to listen to medical experts and lead us out of the crisis.

Now we hold a silence, that we might lift to God other concerns resting heavily on us, that we might be still and listen for the still small voice of God.

In the name of our Mothering God we pray. Amen.

We conclude our worship together by singing from our Singing the Faith hymn book number 610 that I think speaks words of hope and encouragement that we need in such a time as this. I pray that these words would live on in your minds long after this worship, strengthening you for the journey through these next months. Best of all God is with us

- 1 Best of all is God is with us,
God will hold and never fail.
Keep that truth when storms are raging,
God remains though faith is frail.
- 2 Best of all is God is with us,
life goes on and needs are met,
God is strongest in our weakness.
Love renews, will not forget.
- 3 Best of all is God is with us,
hearts are challenged, strangely warmed,
faith is deepened, courage strengthened,
grace received and hope reformed.
- 4 Best of all is God is with us,
in our joy and through our pain,
till that final acclamation:
'life is Christ, and death is gain.'
- 5 Best of all is God is with us
as we scale eternal heights,
love grows stronger, undiminished;
earth grows dim by heaven's lights.

Andrew Pratt (b. 1948)
Based on John Wesley's final words.

And now may God our Creator sustain us as we leave this act of worship.
May the power of Jesus love fill us with courage to face the challenges of these days.

And the Consolation and love of the Holy Spirit keep us safe in the embrace of God, now and forever more.

Amen.

Do get in touch with us at the Colchester Methodists YouTube channel or via FaceBook, via email snail mail or telephone.

We would love to receive comments and questions and prayer requests. We would like to hear advice on how you think we can do this better or ideas for future talks. Just be gentle with us this is a very new thing for us all!

God bless you

Joe

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