

Worship for 4th Sunday in Lent (Mothering Sunday) (complete text. A video version is also online)

Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

*Welcome to worship, this Mothering Sunday.
 Maybe a day off from however you have chosen
 to fast for Lent?
 My name is Ann Howe. Nigel Saxton is preaching
 today on 'Being Rescued by Grace' and our
 thanks go to Rev Jemima Strain and Trevor
 Pethick for the readings.
 If I could, I would give a posy to all the women
 joining us here, to celebrate today with love.*

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

We often talk about God as Father, but did you know we can also talk about God as Mother? Isaiah describes the hope of peace like God breastfeeding her children, who drink deeply, 'As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you' (Isaiah 66:11 – 13).

The Psalms (eg 69:17) speak of God running to pick us up when we anxiously cry out. That thought is in verse 3 of our first hymn, 'then to my need he like a mother doth speed'; a hymn of praise and adoration, let's worship God together,

Hymn: StF 88 – Praise to the Lord the Almighty

- 1. Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!**
O my soul, praise him, for he is thy health and salvation!
All ye who hear, brothers and sisters, draw near,
praise him in glad adoration.

- 2. Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and defend thee;**
surely his goodness and mercy here daily attend thee:
ponder anew what the Almighty can do,
who with his love doth befriend thee.
- 3. Praise to the Lord, who doth nourish thy life and restore thee,**
fitting thee well for the tasks that are ever before thee,
then to thy nee he like a mother doth speed,
spreading the wings of grace o'er thee.
- 4. Praise to the Lord, who, when darkness of sin is abounding,**
who, when the godless do triumph, all virtue confounding,
sheddeth his light, chaseth the horrors of night,
saints with his mercy surrounding.
- 5. Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore him!**
All that hath life and breath, come now with praises before him!
Let the amen sound from this people again:
gladly for aye we adore him.

Joachim Neander (1650 – 1680)
translates by Catherine Winkworth (1827 – 1878)
 and Rupert E Davies (1909 – 1994)

Prayer for Mothering Sunday

The first half of March has been a celebration of women: it was World Day of Prayer on Friday 5th and International Women's Day on Monday 8th,

so I will include all women, not just mothers, in my prayers.

Some of what follows was written for International Women's Day

Let's pray:

As we celebrate and give thanks for the achievements of women; we remember the women who have played a part in our lives.

Those who have
nurtured us,
taught us,
inspired us,
loved us.

Compassionate God,
you feed all your children like a mother, bringing peace to our hearts.

We rest in your arms and look into your eyes and adore you.

We want to reflect your sensitivity toward those whose journey to this Mothering Sunday has been difficult, and we would gather them gently, as Paul said to the Thessalonians, *'like a mother caring for her little children'* and bring them into God's embrace (1 Thessalonians 2:6b – 7).

Confession & assurance

Loving, forgiving God,
We confess we are not always caring, nurturing or compassionate to the created world, we do not always love our neighbour.

We get what we think, what we say and what we do, wrong.

We're sorry, Lord and ask that you fill us with your Holy Spirit, so that we can turn around and live the right way.

Thank you that you forgive us, because of all that Jesus accomplished by grace, at Easter.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

We say the Lord's prayer:

**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 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 forever
Amen**

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

1st Reading Numbers 21:4-9 (NRSVA)

⁴From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. ⁵The people spoke against God and against Moses, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.' ⁶Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. ⁷The people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸And the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.' ⁹So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit

someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22 (NRSVA)

Thanksgiving for Deliverance from Many Troubles

¹O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures for ever.
²Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,
those he redeemed from trouble
³and gathered in from the lands,
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south.

¹⁷Some were sick through their sinful ways,
and because of their iniquities endured
affliction;
¹⁸they loathed any kind of food,
and they drew near to the gates of death.
¹⁹Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress;
²⁰he sent out his word and healed them,
and delivered them from destruction.
²¹Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to humankind.
²²And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices,
and tell of his deeds with songs of joy.

His love endures forever; let's sing,

*Hymn: StF 77 – Give thanks to the Lord, our God
and King*

- 1. Give thanks to the Lord, our God and King:
his love endures forever.
For he is good, he is above all things.
His love endures forever.
Sing praise, sing praise.**
- 2. With a mighty hand and an outstretched
arm
his love endures forever.
For the life that's been reborn,**

**his love endures forever.
Sing praise, sing praise.
Sing praise, sing praise.**

***Forever God is faithful,
forever God is strong.
Forever God is with us,
forever.
Forever God is faithful,
forever God is strong.
Forever God is with us,
forever.
Forever.***

- 3. From the rising to the setting sun,
his love endures forever.
By the grace of God, we will carry on,
his love endures forever.
Sing praise, sing praise.
Sing praise, sing praise.**

***Forever God is faithful,
forever God is strong.
Forever God is with us,
forever.
Forever God is faithful,
forever God is strong.
Forever God is with us,
forever.
Forever.***

Chris Tomlin (b1972)
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Epistle Ephesians 2:1-10 (NRSVA)

From Death to Life

¹You were dead through the trespasses and sins
²in which you once lived, following the course of
this world, following the ruler of the power of
the air, the spirit that is now at work among
those who are disobedient. ³All of us once lived

among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. ⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ —by grace you have been saved— ⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— ⁹not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Gospel *John 3:14-21 (NRSVA)*

¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹But those who do what is true come to the

light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.’

By grace we are saved through faith; let’s sing,

Hymn: StF 565 – Only by grace can we enter

**Only by grace can we enter,
only by grace can we stand;
not by our human endeavour,
but by the blood of the Lamb.
Into your presence you call us,
you call us to come.
Into your presence you draw us,
and now by your grace we come,
now by your grace we come.**

**Lord if you would mark our transgressions,
who would stand?**

**Thanks to your grace we are cleansed
by the blood of the Lamb.**

**Lord, if you mark our transgression,
who would stand?**

**Thanks to your grace we are cleansed
by the blood of the Lamb.**

**Only by grace can we enter,
only by grace can we stand;
not by our human endeavour,
but by the blood of the Lamb.
Into your presence you call us,
you call us to come.
Into your presence you draw us,
and now by your grace we come,
now by your grace we come.**

Gerrit Gustafson

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Sermon

We are at the 4th Sunday in Lent and you have already heard the readings from the Lectionary.

In case anyone does not know what Lectionary means – it is a list of readings from the Bible appointed for worship on any given day or occasion. You know that as a preacher I am keen to isolate the dominant thought for my talk. I will link our readings for today under the theme of 'RESCUED BY GRACE'.

The book of Numbers describes the years that the Israelites spend in the Sinai desert. Where an entire generation lived and died in the wilderness. The book of Numbers counts the people and records events. The wilderness years were hard for the Israelites – they did a lot of complaining – even wishing that they were back in Egypt. We are coming to the end of a hard time on account of the Coronavirus, and I expect that we have done some grumbling – although, as I speak it has only lasted one year. Even though the people in Numbers grumbled against God, they still experienced his power and mercy. In our passage from chapter 21, God sends venomous snakes to punish the people BUT, after begging for forgiveness they are rescued. By looking at a bronze replica of a snake on a pole they are healed from snake-bites. In our reading from John, Jesus takes this as an image of himself – he comes to be with us in the sight of, and for the sake of, the whole world.

The theologian Wayne Grudem defines sin as any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude or nature.

The history of the human race as presented in Scripture is primarily a history of man in a state of sin and rebellion against God, and of God's plan of redemption to bring people back to himself.

In respect of the verses from Psalm 107 that were read to us, here is a sort of review of God's rescue of his people from desperate situations that they have brought upon themselves. It says

in verses 17- 18 that God's people became fools. This does not mean they were unintelligent or ignorant, it means they wilfully rejected God's way so brought destruction on themselves.

However in verse 19 of the Psalm *comes the cry to God for help* and in verse 20 we are told that he speaks and snatches them from the jaws of death. Notice how we have a God of action who turns situations around.

We are each accountable to God as individuals. In Ezekiel Chapter 3 God tells the prophet “If you warn the people & they keep on sinning and refuse to repent, they will die in their sins, but if you warn them and they repent, they will live.” You may disagree with my next thought which is, as well behaved & respectable people we may not appreciate the full force of salvation compared to those of a criminal background. To go deeper we need to ask “are there degrees of sin or different levels of sin?” This question may be answered 'yes' or 'no' depending on the sense in which it is intended. Now in its impact on society and laws that relate to crime, the answer is yes – let me pretend I am jealous of my neighbour's car, which is bad, but not a crime. I decide to steal it – still no crime, but if I drive the car away and run over my neighbour as he rushes out to stop me, the results of my jealousy have had serious consequences. However, in the eyes of God all sin is equal, as jealousy, plans of theft and harming others are all totally repugnant to him as a holy God.

My wife and I arrived in Kenilworth two years ago, having spent most of our life-times in the Lake District where I climbed hills for nearly 70 years. Mountain Rescue teams have never been called out on my behalf, but throughout Lakeland there are volunteers **who do go out** to rescue walkers or climbers who get into difficulties. Last month- in the early hours of

February 6th, a volunteer named Chris Lewis, was severely injured when on a call-out on Red Screes involving two men from Leicester and Liverpool who were in breach of lock down rules. Mr Lewis fell 500ft down a steep slope damaging his spine and fracturing his face. The chairman of the Lake District Search and Mountain Rescue Association, Richard Warren, called Mr Lewis' fall the worst accident he had ever seen. He said: 'It is really hitting the mountain rescue teams hard, but response from the public has been fantastic and we want to pass our thanks to everybody who has sent messages of support.' So here is an example of a rescue being carried out to those who had been disobedient with a high cost being paid by the rescuer and this is how God rescues us through Jesus.

Now this issue of being doomed by refusing to obey God that we looked at in our Old Testament readings from Numbers and Psalm 107 together with God's willingness to rescue, is repeated & enlarged by Paul in our reading from Ephesians. Here are Paul's words from this passage using the Message version of the Bible. *"It's a wonder God didn't do away with the whole lot of us. Instead, immense in mercy & with incredible love he embraced us, he took our sin - dead lives and made us alive in Christ."* Jesus himself had a lively, daily awareness of heaven and hell and was radically reasonable about these things. If we will live forever in bliss or torment, then securing the one and escaping the other is more important than most of us think. If we are also members of churches we can be led astray in two ways. The first is legalism where the Church's attitude is "Sin is unacceptable and we will make sure that you conform to all of **our** rules". The opposite error is "We are assured of heaven so anything goes" which is actually an abuse of grace. The correct stance for us all is that Jesus gives us the

freedom not to sin. Satan's ultimate weapon against us is our own sin. In our lives as believers, the closer we get to the light of God we become more and more aware of how dirty we are, so I will finish with the marvellous words from John's gospel that Trevor has already given us, that tell us how the fangs of Satan have been pulled out for us as believers.

"There is no judgement against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. And the judgement is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All those who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants."

Affirmation of Faith.

We will now affirm our faith by singing hymn number 274 in Singing the Faith, which begins Jesus Christ, I think about your sacrifice. In verse 2 it says "we marvel at this saving grace". As we head towards Easter let us celebrate our rescue by Jesus, with a re-commitment to be obedient, and let us try to be joyful in our obedience as we persevere in our faith, especially when we encounter difficulties. Amen,

Hymn: StF 274 – Jesus Christ I think upon your sacrifice

- 1. Jesus Christ, I think upon your sacrifice, you became nothing, poured out to death. Many times I've wondered at your gift of life, and I'm in that place again. And I'm in that place again.**

***And once again I look upon
the cross where you died,
I'm humbled by your mercy
and I'm broken inside.
Once again I thank you,
once again I pour out my life.***

- 2. Now you are exalted to the highest place,
King of the heavens, where one day I'll bow.
But for now, I marvel at this saving grace,
and I'm full of praise once again.
I'm full of praise once again.**

***And once again I look upon
the cross where you died,
I'm humbled by your mercy
and I'm broken inside.
Once again I thank you,
once again I pour out my life.***

**Thank you for the cross,
thank you for the cross,
thank you for the cross, my Friend.
Thank you for the cross,
thank you for the cross,
thank you for the cross, my Friend.**

***And once again I look upon
the cross where you died,
I'm humbled by your mercy
and I'm broken inside.
Once again I thank you,
once again I pour out my life.***

Matt Redman (b 1974)
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THE RESPONSE

The Offering

In whatever creative way we are bringing our life
and talent, time and money, we dedicate our

offering to you.

Amen

Prayers

Thanksgiving

Gracious God,

Thank you that you are forever faithful.

Thank you that that you suffered and died for us
and were resurrected to new life.

Thank you that you rescued us by grace, through
faith, to share that new life with you.

We thank you for the example of the stories in
the Bible of marginalised women, like Rahab and
Ruth. Thank you that you spoke to them and you
still speak to us.

For other people

Compassionate God,

We bring before you those suffering from
sickness, from need, from anxiety or who are
grieving,

and pray for your help and strength in their time
of trouble.

We pray especially for doubly vulnerable women
living in countries where it is hardest to be a
Christian, who are persecuted, both for their
gender and for their faith
and ask that they are seen, valued and
empowered to reach their God-given potential.
We ask that you will be enable those women to
be the light of hope in their families and
communities.

We pray for not only for women, but men too,
suffering from a surge of domestic violence in
the UK, where women and children are locked
down with their abusers, that they will find the
refuge and support they need.

We pray for an increased number of girls in our
own land, suffering from FGM during Covid

lockdown, that they will be able to access necessary healthcare and support.

We ask that you remember women who have been abducted and enslaved, like those trafficked from North Korea to China, that they will know your love, comfort and strength in their time of trouble and find a way of escape.

We bring all these prayers in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: StF 94 – To God be the Glory great things he has done

- 1. To God be the glory, great things he has done!
So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,
who yielded his life in 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 has done!***

- 2. O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
to every receiver the promise of God!
And every offender who truly believes,
that moment from Jesus a pardon receives:**

***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 has done!

- 3. Great things he has taught us, great things he has 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! 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 has done!***

Frances Jane van Alstyne (Fanny Crosby) (1920 – 1915)

Benediction

The love of the Father enfold us,
the wisdom of the Son enlighten us,
the fire of the Spirit enflame us;
and the blessing of God, the Three in One,
be upon us and abide with us now and forever.

Amen

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Hymn Words:

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StF 77 – Give thanks to the Lord, our God and King

Chris Tomlin (b1972)

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StF 565 – Only by grace can we enter

Gerrit Gustafson

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StF 274 – Jesus Christ I think upon your sacrifice

Matt Redman (b 1974)

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