

FOURTH LENT, YEAR A – ST HELEN'S, ABINGDON
Mothering Sunday — 15 March 2026



Exodus 2.1–10 / Colossians 3.12–17 / John 19.25–27

Sian...

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit – *Amen*

FOR THE LAST THREE SUNDAYS, in the Spiritual Snacks we share after the main service, I've been talking through the words and actions and the rationale of our communion worship. We *say* things, and *do* things, and *mean* things in our Holy Communion service in order to bind things together, hoping and trusting that when particular intentions and actions and declarations converge, *extraordinary* things happen. That can misfire; sometimes bringing together a big basket of gestures and words and purposes just generates confusion. Sometimes, though, a majestic marriage of many elements makes marvellous music — think of a *choir* or an *orchestra*, or more humbly a *big band*. Put together a piccolo, a bass drum, a flugelhorn, a viola, a harp, and dozens of their musical siblings and cousins, with the imagination of Tchaikovsky or Mahler, and the grandeur of that symphonic composition can take the breath away from even a lowbrow rock'n'roller such as I.

Today, the church throws at us a heap of liturgical ingredients such as would challenge the most expert theological Iron Chef. Our parish observes Mothering Sunday, laden with posies and with lessons that grab two mothers out of the Bible and a heartwarming epistle about 'compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience', but plenty of churches will just forge ahead with the 4th Sunday of Lent (reading about

the Man Born Blind this year), and still others observe *Lætare* Sunday, focusing attention on our rejoicing with Jerusalem, drawing from the prophet Isaiah's invitation to us to 'rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her — that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast, that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious bosom.' *Whew!* Most Sundays I would simply dig in to one or another of the lessons we read, and focus our attention on a single message easy to grasp. But since we've been examining *how things come together*, how we *orchestrate* the distinct voices and themes and gestures and expressions that constitute our shared Sunday worship, I want to propose a way of seeing in the bracing variety of theologies in play this Sunday as a sort of liturgical poem, a fiction, a *made meaning* in which we can recognise complementary harmonious chords of faith among the swirling themes that our church calendar tosses at us.

So, we begin by remembering — for some will be put out if we let it escape our notice — that we observe Mothering Sunday today. We remember mothering for all that is *best* about mothers; that's why today we read from the letter to the Colossians that we should 'clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience', qualities that people have often associated with mums. But we should add to that the *ferocity* of love that stands up for children, the *determination* that unfairness and injustice be eradicated for all, the *pride* that lifts up and glorifies our young people's accomplishments, the *steadfastness* that stands by youth who haven't yet carved out their own flavour of integrity and wisdom. Now, these qualities don't belong *exclusively* to mothers — *all* of us can participate in them to a greater or lesser extent, and some mothers aren't so good at these as are others. Indeed, some mothers absent themselves, physically or emotionally or both, from those who need and trust them; and some mothers bring down misery on anyone who depends

on them, a particularly *bitter* misery since we have such great hopes for the best in our moms. Mothers hand down their best qualities to us, and they hand down their suffering to us, often in helplessness or ignorance. But in church, in this house of God, we aim our spirits heavenward with forgiveness and patience, with gratitude and charity. On Mothering Sunday we uphold all that is best in the bearing and upbringing and encouraging of children, with the honesty to confess that that's not always what we find.

We may say the same for Jerusalem, a City of Peace, the mother city of worship of the One God. The earthly Jerusalem falls prey to the weaknesses of we humans who inhabit Mount Zion. We boast, we covet, we enslave, injure and kill; we mistrust, we imagine evil, we abuse those different from us, on the very mountain from which we look out upon the Land of Promise, the site of the house of prayer for all nations, all peoples. And *of course* we have reasons. We have suffered at the hands of others just as our foremothers did, and out of our wounds some of us feel the temptation to lash out at those who hurt us — and if we can't reach those who hurt us, maybe we lash out at bystanders, schoolchildren, just to inflict suffering, as if making other people suffer will alleviate our grief. And so at the end of all things, when God weighs all hearts and heals all wounds, we will know a *new* Jerusalem in which love and peace prevail at last, where the lion and the lamb will lie down in peace together.

You may have noticed a third Mother whom I have not mentioned — our own mothers, Jerusalem our Mother City, and now also Mary the Mother of the Lord, of whom we read in today's gospel lesson. As Prior Christopher Jamison of the English Benedictines said Sunday evening at the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, we know her not as 'Milady', but as *Our Lady*, for the whole church are her daughters and sons. She it is to whom Simeon prophesied that a sword would pierce her heart, and she it is who stood by her Son's cross at his death, fulfilling

Simeon's word. She embraces all who find in her a source of hope, of comfort, of love that endures through hardship. Our Lady, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, shows us a steadfastness and blessedness to which we can all aspire, into which we can grow.

So this morning our church remembers mothers personal and universal, present and past and radiant on the horizon of hope. For the many of us for whom 'mothering' brings troubling thoughts or painful memories; for the many of us who can no longer thank mothers whom we loved dearly, and who brought us with their love to where we stand today; for all, we share these posies as a sign of respect and appreciation for all that is best in their role, and we raise up the promise that one day we *all* will know the kindness and love of a divine, motherly love. For we who worship Jesus, Son of Mary, we give unimpeachably biblical thanks as well for his mother, full of grace, blessed among all women. For those of us who mourn the streets of cities running with the blood of noncombatant women and children, we fix our hearts on that City of Peace, a new Jerusalem, where the sons and daughters of Sarah *and* Hagar can lay down their swords together, where all their children can play together without hatred or fear. For Mothering Sunday, we pray for all mothers, all children, all who love peace, in the words God spoke by Isaiah the prophet: *Lætare Jerusalem, et conventum facite omnes qui diligitis eam;* Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her.... As a mother comforts her child, so I, God, will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

 In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit —
Amen