

**Mothering Sunday Circuit Service,
Sunday 14th March 2021
Farnworth and Worsley Circuit**



Welcome and Call to Worship:

Welcome everyone. Wherever you are, whatever you are doing, whatever your circumstances are, we are glad that you are here, joining in worship together.

Today is Mothering Sunday, remembered in many different ways, and with many different emotions. It is a time to celebrate, to give thanks, and to recall the mothering, gentle, powerful and gracious love of God. So now we come with a word of prayer. Let us pray.

Lord, we come together,
Lord, we gather in your presence.
As we meet to greet you,
Open up our hearts.
Lord, we are weary,
And we are tired of searching,
Come and find us, lead us,
Bring us back to you.

*God of Grace
God of Peace
God of timeless Love,
Give us faith
Give us hope
Give us strength to trust in you.*

Hymn:

Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesu, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,
never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation,
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation,
perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise!

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

Prayer of Praise and Confession:

Creator God,
we praise you, for you have created all things
and lovingly made us in your image.

Nurturing God,
we praise you for the way in which you care for each of us;
providing us with all that we need to live.

Loving God,
You are our companion and friend,
guiding us and helping us through our lives,
sharing in our joy and comforting us when we are lonely and sad.

Forgiving God,
you love us whoever we are, whatever we do.
Even though we often get things wrong,
you are always there, concerned for our welfare, forgiving us.

Forgive us for the times that we take you for granted,
for forgetting that you are there.

Forgive us when we do things that hurt others,
especially members of our family and friends.

Forgive us and guide us back to you.
Bring us home again.
Mother, Father God,
Thank you for your eternal love.

Amen.

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 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.

Reading: Numbers 21: 4-9 (Revised English Bible)

From Mount Hor they left by way of the Red Sea to march round the flank of Edom. But on the way the people grew impatient and spoke against God and Moses. Why have you brought us up from Egypt, they said, to die in the desert where there is neither food nor water? We are heartily sick of this miserable fare.

Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them, and they bit the Israelites so that many of them died. The people came to Moses and said, we sinned when we spoke against the Lord and you. Plead with the Lord to rid us of the snakes.

Moses interceded for the people, and the Lord told him to make a serpent and erect it as a standard, so that anyone who had been bitten could look at it and recover.

So Moses made a bronze serpent and erected it as a standard, in order that anyone bitten by a snake could look at the bronze serpent and recover.

Reading: John 3: 14-21

Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, in order that everyone who has faith may in him have eternal life.

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that everyone who has faith in him may not perish but have eternal life. It was not to judge the world that God sent his Son into the world, but that through him the world might be saved.

No one who puts his faith in him comes under judgement; but the unbeliever has already been judged because he has not put his trust in God's only Son.

This is the judgement: the light has come into the world, but people preferred darkness to light because their deeds were evil. Wrongdoers hate the light and avoid it, for fear their misdeeds should be exposed.

Those who live by the truth come to the light so that it may be clearly seen that God is in all they do.

Hymn:

Light of the world,
you stepped down into darkness,
opened my eyes, let me see
beauty that made this heart adore you,
hope of a life spent with you.
*So here I am to worship,
here I am to bow down,
here I am to say that you're my God,
and you're altogether lovely,
altogether worthy,
altogether wonderful to me.*

King of all days
oh so highly exalted,
glorious in heaven above.
Humbly you came
to the earth you created,
all for love's sake became poor.
*So here I am to worship,
here I am to bow down,
here I am to say that you're my God,
and you're altogether lovely,
altogether worthy,
altogether wonderful to me.*

And I'll never know how much it cost
to see my sin upon that cross.
And I'll never know how much it cost
to see my sin upon that cross.

So here I am to worship ...

Tim Hughes

Reflection: Rev. Darren Garfield

Thornton Road Junior School, mid 1970s, and Gerald Durrell comes to the school and stands there in the middle of the main hall, in assembly, with this huge, enormous, boa constrictor. I remember it to this day! Forget about the hymns and the prayers and anything else that happened in assembly, I will never forget that snake! How we managed to get the famous Gerald Durrell is beyond me, but he came and, regardless of health and safety, there was that enormous boa constrictor, which people had the opportunity to see. Snakes aren't so bad, he said, don't be scared of them.

Well, I'm not sure about this snake from the Old Testament reading. It's one of the lesser-known stories and is a bit odd, to be honest, primitive, magical, superstitious, strange, weird. Just weird! And what makes it even more bizarre is the introduction of snakes – two

snakes, well two types of snakes – real, nasty, poisonous ones that you would run a mile from, and then this enormous, majestic, beautiful and awesome bronze snake.

It would make a great film; it would make a great musical. In fact I remember singing in a musical by Roger Jones years ago where this reading took centre stage. It is that dramatic. Maybe it should be better known! It's got all the ingredients of a good production, with an impressive cast – the people of Israel, wandering, grumbling, moaning, complaining. Having to leave Egypt and go meandering through the wilderness in search of a new and better land. When I say grumbling, I mean real, serious chuntering. It was better then, bring back the old days – I think the further they got from Egypt they started to forget just how badly they were treated there. So they quarrelled. They quarrelled with each other, they quarrelled with Moses, saying he was a bad leader, and they quarrelled with God.

God had had enough. "Right, that's it, I've had it up to here with you. I've had enough!" And whereas you'd think God would say, "It's alright, don't worry, I understand." This time, the Lord says, "there you go." And snake after snake after snake were created and they delivered their fatal bite, time after time after time. As I say, strange, weird, odd, scary. I don't like it, if I'm honest. My picture of God isn't of one who sends out snake after snake, inflicting pain and worse on people. Thankfully the story isn't so much about punishment, more about the remedy. Because then, then we get the about turn, the change.

The people apologise, Moses pleads for them, because that's what he does – he's a great pray-er for his people – and God turns into the master sculptor by making this beautiful bronze snake. Majesty and mercy, power and pity, loftiness and love. That's what we see here! The snake, the serpent, becomes a symbol of hope. This dangerous creature becomes an image of salvation. Instead of running away from it, the people of Israel run towards the bronze snake, finding healing and hope. I suppose, if nothing else, it reminds us that God is God, that God is uncontainable, and that if you try to put God in a

box, God will just come jumping out, with power and yet full of mercy and love. That is the nature of God.

Now trying to compare Jesus to a snake, might just be a step too far, but that's what John does. And you can't help but see the link between the bronze snake being set on a pole, and lifted up, and Jesus lifted onto a wooden cross. I suppose those early readers of John's gospel would have put two and two together and seen it as Jesus being lifted on the cross, that act of sacrificial love. Now it all starts to come together! Now we begin to glimpse the heart of God, the God who loves the world so much that he gave his only son, so that everyone who has faith in him may not perish but have eternal life. God loves the world.

Those words are everywhere! Car stickers, the side of buses, on tea shirts, mugs, everywhere. Possibly the most famous verse in the bible! And what it tells us is this – Jesus' body, tortured, broken, then lifted up on an instrument of torture, becomes our healing and our source of eternal life.

The world is the object of God's love. The world. Not just Lancashire or Yorkshire or the Midlands. But the world. And not just the church, not Methodism or Anglicanism or the many other denominations. But the world, in all its beauty and wonder, and pain and anguish. The world, in all its variety and difference and hugeness and smallness. The world, loved and encompassed by God. And you know, even bigger than that, the cosmos, the planets, the stars, the sun and moon and everything in-between and beyond, all loved by God.

God says to us, look up. Lift up your eyes, stop looking at your feet, but look upwards and outwards and see the world around you, and everyone in it, loved, cherished, precious. Be amazed by God's generous love; be encouraged by God who loves us so much that he gave us his son. God's salvation is for everyone. Not just the chosen few, not just those who say and do what they think are the right things to say and do. . No one is outside the scope of God's love;

there are no ifs and buts and maybes, just a simple act of faith, of turning towards God, of trust. As simple as that.

And here's the thing – God doesn't want anyone to perish, but God wants everyone to know, to experience life in all its fullness. Not next year, or next week, or tomorrow, or even in an hour's time. But now, in this moment, right now. Life in all its fullness. That eternal life isn't just a one-off action, it's an everyday looking for opportunities to live by the truth, to come out of the shadows, and trust.

Today is Mothering Sunday. Well, yes, it's Mother's Day, but it's also Mothering Sunday. Remembering when many people worked long hours as servants in large houses, on farms or in factories, Mothering Sunday was the one day in the year when they were allowed to visit their parents. Sometimes they took a special gift, like a simnel cake, to say thank you for all their mothers had done for them. They also went with their families to their home church, the 'Mother Church' to thank God. For some it was a time of joy, for some a time of sadness; it was and remains a day that produces a mix of emotions. But it is also a time to remember the mothering, nurturing, protecting, compassionate love of God who did indeed come to save the world.

Just possibly, John 3: 16 can be more than a slogan, or a fridge magnet or a memory verse, but a plan of action, a way of living, of looking for opportunities to shine in our world, helping to disperse the shadows of sadness, despair, loneliness and fear. And living out the mothering, gentle yet powerful love of God.

Hymn:

Mothering God, you gave me birth,
in the bright morning of this world.
Creator, source of every breath,
you are my rain, my wind, my sun.

Mothering Christ, you took my form,
offering me your food of light,
grain of new life, and grape of love,
your very body for my peace.

Mothering Spirit, nurturing one,
in arms of patience hold me close,
so that in faith I root and grow
until I flower, until I know.

Prayers for others and for the world:

Welcome to our prayers of intercession, and a happy Mothering Sunday. I remember last year, Mothering Sunday was the first Sunday that we closed our church, 22nd March due to Covid, and now almost a year later we are still closed.

Heavenly Father we remember today our Mothers, and how different Mother's Day will be spent once again for many of us, not the usual celebrations, however, we look forward to hopefully celebrating Mother's Day in our churches next year.

Heavenly Father we pray for all the school children who have returned to school this week, many of them returning after months away, we pray that they can enjoy some kind of normality, and we pray for all the teachers and staff, that they may return to a normal routine, help them to feel your strength and love.

Heavenly Father we pray for all the residents of care homes who, can now look forward to a visit from a loved one, and we pray for all the staff and volunteers, who work so tirelessly and give so much love and support to the residents.

Heavenly Father we continue to pray for all the NHS staff who are working so hard to distribute the Covid Vaccine, and we pray for all those who are in hospital with Covid, or any illness, that they may

feel your love and strength around them, and we pray also for all who are ill at home, or housebound, or at the end of life, that they too will feel your love and compassion, and

Heavenly Father we pray for ourselves, that we may have the strength and courage to carry on in these difficult times. We pray that we will always know how much you love each and everyone of us, regardless of who we are, or what we do or don't do, and that our sins will be forgiven, now and forever more. **Amen.**

Offering:

(For the offering we bring this week we offer this prayer :)

A moment of quiet, a moment to pray, a moment to be still in the presence of God.

Loving God,
Our Creator, who gives us life and meaning,
Our Saviour, who gives us wholeness and hope,
Our Comforter, who gives us peace and joy,
We make our gifts to you:
The things we have, the time we spend, the people we are.
May they show your love to all the world.
In Christ's name.

Amen

Hymn:

Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,
whose trust, ever childlike, no cares could destroy,
be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,
your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.

Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,
whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe,
be there at our labours, and give us, we pray,
your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.

Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,
be there at our homing, and give us, we pray,
your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.

Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,
be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,
your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.

Jan Struther (Joyce Placzek) (1901–1953)

Blessing:

Loving Lord, help us to look to you in the places we go and in the people we meet.
Guide us when the way ahead seems full of obstacles and shadows.
May we always give thanks, even in the bleakest of times,
and help us to shine in the world.
And God says, I name you, I hold you, I love you.
Go in peace.

Amen.

After Service Telephone Chat:

Sunday 14th March 11:45 AM

Telephone Number: 0333 011 0616

Access code: 623 5908

Please note the call asks you to press the '£' key after entering the access code. You can either press the '#' key, or just wait, and you will be connected to the telephone chat.

After Service Zoom Chat:

Sunday 14th March from 11:45 AM

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2172687931?
pwd=aHVOb1VsUnE1SlI3OSTSaFRDQnVaQT09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2172687931?pwd=aHVOb1VsUnE1SlI3OSTSaFRDQnVaQT09)

Meeting ID: 217 268 7931

Passcode: RevDazzer

Online circuit services are available to view:

on YouTube, search 'Darren Garfield'

on websites/Facebook pages of all churches in the circuit where available

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