



This short act of worship has been produced for you by Revd Kathleen Richardson. If you are well enough and able, why not spend a few moments with God, perhaps at a time when you would normally be sharing with others in church and pray for them as they pray for you.

### CALL TO WORSHIP

By grace we have been saved through faith, and this is not our doing; it is the gift of God - not the result of our own efforts. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

### PRAYER OF ADORATION AND THANKSGIVING

Eternal God, we approach you with joy, at your invitation. You have called us to look for you and promised that when we do, we will not be met with rejection or silence, but by the fulness of your love, expressed in the life and death of Jesus, and in the gift of your Spirit to guide and empower us.

In this season of Lent, you remind us of the lengths to which you will go to reveal your love for all your people and invite us to find our own ways of responding.

On this day, marked as Mothering Sunday, we thank you for Mary, the mother of Jesus, who believed in your promise and enabled your purposes.

We thank you for all those who have shown us care and selfless love, corrected us, supported our efforts, comforted us in pain and sorrow; and for those who guided us towards faith. In our pilgrimage of love and hope, you have set before us the promise of life eternal and for this we praise and worship you.

**Amen**

### HYMN God with us: Creator, Father (Singing the Faith 8)

Sing / read / pray / proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ftfZDbpuJg>

God with us: Creator, Father,  
bringing everything to birth;  
Mother of the whole creation,

fire of stars and life of earth:  
down the countless years composing,  
from the earth's evolving night,  
love's response to love, and forming  
mind and soul to seek your light.

God with us: Redeemer, Brother,  
Friend for ever at our side,  
here, in flesh, you walked among us,  
taking up your cross, you died.  
Crucified, despised, rejected,  
Perfect Love, who shared our shame,  
streaming from the cross, your judgment,  
full of mercy, clears our name.

God with us: Unwearied Spirit,  
from the birth of time and space,  
surging through unconscious being,  
joyful, Life-creating Grace:  
through the centuries you find us;  
you, as God, inspire our prayer;  
Life and Power at work within us,  
Love for ever, everywhere!

God, Transcendent, far beyond us,  
closest Friend, unfailing Guide:  
through the ages, wronged, affronted,

in your poor, still crucified!  
God with us: convict, forgive us;  
by your holy love destroy  
all that hinders peace and justice:  
fill this aching world with joy!

Alan Gaunt (b. 1935)

#### **PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Gracious God, in Jesus you have set before us the lengths to which your love will go to reach us and have given us the assurance that we cannot go anywhere beyond the circle of your love;  
yet we come to you now aware that so often we live as though you are not there.

We fail to discern your priorities for the right ordering of your kingdom of love; seeking success and satisfaction and all the good things in life and failing to see you also at work in times of difficulty and loss and doubt.

Forgive us when we hide behind the façade of faith while allowing fear to invade our hopes, and timidity to prevent us from new initiatives.

Forgive us when we choose to stay silent when we should speak truth to wrongdoing and discrimination.

Forgive our desire to win friends and influence people and our fear of criticism and ill-will.

Keep us from self-pity when life is hard and give us love and mercy to support each other, to renew our faith and to bring hope to your world.

In the name of Jesus, we pray.

### **ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS**

Those who come to the light find their sins are forgiven and rejoice in God's goodness and grace.

Thanks be to God. Amen

### **READING** John 3: 14-21

*Jesus is speaking with Nicodemus, a Pharisee, and a leader of the Jews, who had come by night to find Jesus. Jesus spoke about being born again and Nicodemus asked, "How can these things be?"*

Jesus said, 'Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believes in him may have eternal life. For 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. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through

him. Those 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. And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But 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.'

### **REFLECTION**

Today is marked as Mothering Sunday. On this day, when we were gathered together in church, it was often a time that became an occasion for family, with attention given to motherhood and children, largely I think, because we have bought into the Mothers' Day practices from America. But in Britain in the early church life, it was the slight easing of Lenten discipline, when halfway through Lent permission was given for apprentices to go back to their homes and to 'mother church'.

There are quite a lot of us missing 'mother church' in these days.

I love the passage in the gospels where Jesus likens himself to a mother hen. He looks over the city of Jerusalem and says, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often have I desired to gather your

children together as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and you would not let me.”

This is the same deep understanding of God’s love that was in the reading for today. Nicodemus, a devout and learned man of faith, deeply impressed by Jesus, and wanting to know more about the power he seems to have, but perhaps not wanting other people to see him consulting Jesus, comes to him in the darkness. Jesus takes him seriously.

He talks to him about the absolute unconditional nature of God’s love for all people. There is nothing that can change God’s intention to go on loving all that God has made. It is not dependent on our belief or discipleship or nationality or faith or good works. It is the absolute nature of God to be love. Our relationship with God is not, ‘I will if you will’. There is no contract. There is nothing we can do to change God’s love towards us. Even if we choose to reject God, God will go on loving to the uttermost.

This must have been hard for Nicodemus to take in. His life was based on keeping the rules and traditions and teaching others to do so.

It is not much easier for us. Salvation is not a reward for believers, not a prize for the most dedicated or the most

repentant. It cannot be earned by doing good works or self-sacrifice. As our lovely baptism liturgy reminds us – before we knew anything of it, Christ died for us.

So, what is the point of our Lenten observances – God could not love us more than when we were the most abject sinners. Jesus did not come to condemn but to save.

But Jesus is clear that there is a choice to be made – to accept God’s love with all the obligations that come through knowing what that salvation cost – or to reject it and continue to live in darkness.

I have a friend who had a heart transplant many years ago. He told me of the gratitude he felt towards that unknown donor, and the way he still tries to live his life so that the gift he received was not donated in vain.

I was much moved by a letter I received last week. The writer had taken upon herself as a Lenten discipline to write a letter every day to someone she had a reason to be grateful for. I was included in her list – for something I had forgotten about that happened over thirty years ago.

It is perhaps an inconvenient truth that God’s purposes are not entirely consistent with our own ideas of happiness, health, or

safety, and we may be required by our discipleship to deny ourselves, to undertake some things that are not, as the Covenant service puts it, 'suitable to our natural inclinations and material interests'. Any small or large sacrifices we make, any extra duties we accept, any overtures of friendship we make as part of our Lenten journey are a response to the life offered through the sacrifice of Jesus.

In the letter to the Christians in Ephesus, we read: (Ephesians 2:1-10)

You were dead through your trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit which is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of the flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created by Christ

Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Thanks be to God.

### **PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Compassionate and most-merciful God, we thank you that in love you sent your son Jesus to share our earthly life with its joy and suffering, to know the love of a mother and to experience a human home. We remember how he wept over Jerusalem with its unwillingness to receive his ministry of love. And we mourn for the human pain present in our cities and villages, and in countries ravaged by conflict, disease and poverty.

Loving God, today on this Mothering Sunday, we praise you for your church that has welcomed and nurtured us into faith, enabled us to grow in confidence and given us the opportunities to give service to others. We pray for our local churches, for the different ways we have found to keep worship, prayer, and study real in these difficult days, and for the plans that we need to make for the future.

Today on this Mother's Day we thank you for all who have exercised a mother's love in our lives, for the families in which we have shared and the homes in which we have participated.

We pray for all homes, that they may be:

places of love and support,  
places of acceptance and security,  
places of forgiveness and tolerance,  
places where both adults and children can grow and develop and be themselves.

We pray for those for whom this day is marked by sadness:

those who are grieving for the loss of family members,  
those suffering from family breakdown,  
those whose experience has been of violence and fear,  
those who longed to be parents and were not,  
those who never knew their mothers or their fathers.

Help us O Lord, to work together, and with you, in home, church and community to make the society we pray for, a living reality.

And a prayer written in the fourteenth century by Margery Kempe, who was a Christian mystic and the mother of fourteen children:

Be to us at all times, O Lord, our unending joy, our eternal bliss

and our enduring comfort. Be to us light in the darkness, strength in temptation and refreshment in the desert. Being penitent for our sins may we never be separated from you, and longing for your face may we behold you in heaven. **Amen.**

### **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

We pray with Jesus

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.**

### **HYMN There's a wideness in God's mercy (Singing the Faith 416)**

Sing / read / pray / proclaim the words or listen to it here  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kamADrIPEDs>

There's a wideness in God's mercy  
like the wideness of the sea;  
there's a kindness in his justice  
which is more than liberty.

+There is plentiful redemption  
in the blood that has been shed;  
there is joy for all the members  
in the sorrows of the Head.

There is grace enough for thousands  
of new worlds as great as this;  
there is room for fresh creations  
in that upper room of bliss.

For the love of God is broader  
than the measures of the mind;  
and the heart of the Eternal  
is most wonderfully kind.

But we make his love too narrow  
by false limits of our own;  
and we magnify his strictness  
with a zeal he will not own.

If our love were but more simple  
we should take him at his word;  
and our lives would be illumined  
by the presence of our Lord.

Frederick William Faber (1814-1863)

### **BLESSING**

God sends us into the world, to accept the cost and to discover  
the joy of discipleship.

We carry with us the peace of Christ, the love of God and the  
encouragement of the Holy Spirit, in both trial and rejoicing.

Amen.