

# twelvebaskets



## LENT 4A

A complete Sunday service ready to use  
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

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**Lent 4 (Mothering Sunday) - Year A**  
19th March 2023



## **Order of Service**

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**186 STF – Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord! OR**

**609 STF – As we gather in your presence now**

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**57 STF – Let all the world in every corner sing OR**

**119 STF – God of Eve and God of Mary**

Readings: 1 Samuel 1:20-28; Colossians 3:12-17; John 19:25-27

**Hymn:**

**504 STF – May the mind of Christ my Saviour OR**

**647 STF – God grant us words to speak**

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**594 STF – Lord Jesus Christ, you have come to us OR**

**393 STF – She sits like a bird**

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

**608 STF – All praise to our redeeming Lord OR**

**731 STF – When, in our music, God is glorified**

Blessing

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## Call to worship

Here we are Lord, we have come –we have come in body, mind and spirit, to worship you this day.

We have come, needy, hopeful, tired, joyful, broken and optimistic. However we have come, we have come to meet with you.

We have come,  
Come Lord Jesus

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## Hymn:

186 STF – Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord! OR

609 STF – As we gather in your presence now

## Opening Prayers

Heavenly Father,  
Divine Mother,  
God of all grace,  
We look to you for rest and seek after you today.

*[Pause]*

In this Lenten season,  
May you refresh and renew us by your Spirit of power and inspiration. We place our trust wholly in you and ask that you might light the path before us.

Lead us Lord during this time of worship. Guide your church so that we might trust in your guidance and wisdom.

*[Pause]*

For the times of struggle we have faced this week and even this day we rely on your presence to dwell deep inside of us. For those that are facing those struggles today, we ask that you might be present for them today.

Nourish and enrich our souls in worship this day.

Might heaven touch earth as we see an overflow of your grace. Might this grace heal life's wounds and fill hearts today.

Give us eyes to see you Lord,  
Give us ears open to hear from you, and  
Give us hearts open to receive from you,

In Jesus' name,  
Amen.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Call to worship written by Tim Baker

<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by Tim Baker

## **We say together the Lord's Prayer**

### **All Age Talk**

Greetings and blessings on this Mothering Sunday. Today is day that we remember our mothers, and those who have been like mothers to us.

Today is a day when some people are proud, happy, recognised, supported, some are pained, grieved, uncertain...

Perhaps this day stirs up special memories of a mother (or mother-figure) who is no longer physically with us, somebody who has died...

Perhaps it stirs up memories of a really hurtful relationship or time with our own mothers...

Or perhaps some of us never knew our mothers, perhaps we live with the pain of absence, perhaps we carry the burden of loss...

Perhaps some of you are mothers: some feeling proud and pleased, others feeling hurt, afraid, alone.

Perhaps you would liked to have been a mother but haven't been able to be.

Perhaps your family carries its own cross of pain and sadness this morning...

We bring a lot of baggage through these doors – this day, as every day...

*[Pause]*

Today is also a day when we get to celebrate women: we celebrate the women who have been inspirational in our lives, the women who have changed us, who have made us better, who have helped us on our journey.

Perhaps our mothers, or perhaps somebody else.

Perhaps somebody we've never met but who was an inspirational woman for us...

I'm just going to give you a minute, to think, in silence, about a woman who has inspired you, and how they did that

*[Pause]*

*[You might like to share your own.]*

These women have shown us something of God...

Today is also a day when we think about God as a Mother, about the female qualities of God. Often we talk about God as Father, but God is so much bigger than our idea of gender, and there is enough of God for us to think of the divine mother too. God is not just male, but also female, and so much more!

The inspirational women in our lives and in history, these amazing women, help us to see something of the female qualities of our infinite and awesome God. Let's celebrate those women, and all women and girls – this day and every day!

Let us pray,  
God my Father and God my Mother  
God the Creator of all,

Thank you for the many women who have inspired us in our lives. We now draw the names of these women to our minds and bring our thanksgiving for them.

We thank you for mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunts, teachers, leaders, inventors, entrepreneurs, and the many other women who have, and are, positively contributing to our lives.

We thank you for endowing women with talents and gifts that benefit our families and communities.

We ask that you will bless them, be near them and strengthen them as they give expression to the potential you have given them.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.<sup>3</sup>

**Hymn:**

57 STF – Let all the world in every corner sing OR

119 STF – God of Eve and God of Mary

**Readings:** 1 Samuel 1:20-28; Colossians 3:12-17; John 19:25-27

**Hymn:**

504 STF – May the mind of Christ my Saviour OR

647 STF – God grant us words to speak

**Reflections on the readings**

I wonder what we might associate with ideal motherhood? Maybe it's some of the characteristics listed in Paul's letter to the Colossians? Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience?

Who might we think of as an ideal mother? In some ways it feels like a slightly Victorian question, but this is exactly what thousands of people were recently asked in a survey conducted about what motherhood means today. Princess Diana came first in the list, ranking alongside Queen Elizabeth the Second, Mother Theresa and Michelle Obama in the top ten. Even Marge Simpson, the infamous blue-haired cartoon character features, ranking ninth on this list of the Great British public's ideal mother figure.

Our stories from Scripture on this Mothering Sunday, offer us some more candidates for this title. Enter Hannah, mother of Samuel, who spent many years asking God for a son, promising to dedicate him to God. Her prayers were answered and, as we heard in our Old Testament reading today, she keeps her word and takes the child to the temple to the service of God.

Unsurprisingly, Hannah mother of Samuel didn't make the top ten list. Let's look to our Gospel reading. Enter Mary, mother of Christ. She did make it onto the list, ranking

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<sup>3</sup> All Age Talk written by Tim Baker

just behind Mary Poppins at number 8. In our reading today she is standing at the foot of the cross with her sister and friends. It might feel slightly premature to us, to be reading about the death of Jesus now, when we're only half way through Lent and still a few weeks away from Good Friday. But it is Mothers' Day, and I think it's helpful, as we journey through Lent towards the cross, to be reminded that Jesus – just like all of us – was a mother's child.

As we read about Mary at the foot of the cross, we might remember that Mary had been warned about the fate that awaited her baby boy. In the story we usually hear at Candlemas, Mary and Joseph take their tiny child, just forty days old, to the Temple to be presented, and Simeon, an old man, a prophet, takes the baby in his arms and says 'this child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel.' What an incredible thing to say about a tiny child, what an incredible destiny to see in his baby face.

Might then, as Simeon is declaring the destiny of Jesus, Mary have been feeling what all mothers feel when they look into the faces of their babies and see all the promise and potential in the lives that lay ahead of them? But then Simeon says to Mary 'and a sword will pierce your own soul too.' Simeon the prophet sees her love for her son, and sees the suffering of the future, the cost of that love. This is a cost which is realised at the foot of the cross for Mary, watching her child be crucified. Simeon's prophetic words are a bittersweet moment for Mary – in the future of the Christ child he foresees both promise and pain.

Perhaps bittersweet is a helpful way to describe motherhood. It's certainly Hannah's experience in the Old Testament. She has a son, a child she has longed for, and then she has to leave him at the Temple. Like Mary, the cost of her love must have been realised as she gave him up. For both these mothers, immense suffering is to be the cost of their love.

This is pain that goes hand in hand with loving somebody. Any of us who have ever loved anyone - children, parents, partners, family, friends - knows that real love hurts. Loving somebody else makes us very vulnerable, makes us open to suffering and pain. Anyone who has ever experienced loss, will be able to relate to the bittersweet taste of love.

In many ways, Hannah's story foreshadows the story of the Gospels. She gives her son up, for the sake of God's work. To honour her promise, she offers her child. In the same way, God's son Jesus is given up to restore the honour of humankind. The love Hannah has for Samuel is a tiny glimpse of the kind of love God has for us. A vast, steadfast, enduring, unconditional, extraordinary love.

We might easily be mistaken in thinking that Hannah, or Mary, or maybe even Princess Diana or Michelle Obama, were the perfect mothers. Loving their children with a perfect, self-sacrificing love. But we know all too well how easily humankind fails the standard set for us by God. We do not love enough. We love conditionally. We love with all kinds of barriers around us. We forget to love. We try our best to love but our brokenness gets in the way. We make unloving choices that damage our relationships. We squeeze love in around less important things. We love unwisely in a way that diminishes us. We love selfishly in a way that diminishes others. Too often the thing we clothe ourselves with is not love and binds nothing together in perfect harmony.

Humans do not love as perfectly as God. Perhaps that's why so many fictional characters made the ideal mother figure list – because their love is a little less flawed than our own experience of love. But we, like Christ, and unlike Marge Simpson, are

human, and therefore our souls are built to love, we're creatures made from love, to love, by our loving God.

When Jesus on the cross asks one of his closest friends to take his mother Mary as his own mother, this is human nature at its most real. In the midst of pain, in the bleak landscape of calvary, a small flower of love blooms as two human beings look to one another for comfort.

Here it is again, the bittersweet taste of love. The most human experience we can have. Although the grief of Jesus' followers at the foot of the cross must have been inconsolable, love was both its cause and its cure. Love makes way for healing in a way nothing else can. Love and brokenness are entwined.

This is incarnation. Jesus, the divine son of God, the perfect embodiment of love, comes to earth and is crucified. The breaking of his body is the ultimate act of love, an act that makes redemption possible for each one of us. His body is broken, and his love poured out for the sake of our brokenness.

The message of the Gospel is not: God's love means we all get a happy ending. The message of the Gospel is not: God's love will stop bad things happening to us. Instead, the Gospel story tells us that we have a God who is with us in the midst of our lives, bearing and sharing our pain, and pouring out a perfect love into our broken hearts – a love which might just, if we let it, redeem us, heal us, save us.<sup>4</sup>

### **Hymn:**

594 STF – Lord Jesus Christ, you have come to us OR

393 STF – She sits like a bird

### **Prayers of intercession**

God who is love, thank you for all the ways we glimpse you in our lives. Thank you for the mothers, grandmothers, or others who have shown us something of your love. Help us to shine the light of your love into the places and people around us.

God who is mother and father to us all, thank you that you love us perfectly even when the people around us don't love us as they ought. We pray especially for all those for whom today will be a painful reminder of difficult relationships between mothers and children. Heal all those who are living daily with the wounds caused by hurtful relationships. Let your perfect love flourish in our lives.

God who is with us in our pain, be with all of us who grieve, who live with disappointment or loss or struggle. We pray especially for mothers who grieve a child, children who grieve mothers, and for those who long to have a child. We pray that your healing love might bind up our broken hearts and lead us into healing and wholeness.

God of redemption, thank you that your love changes everything for us, our communities, and our world. Help us to join in with your work and bring about your Kingdom of justice and peace.

Amen.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Reflection written by Holly Adams

<sup>5</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Holly Adams

### **We will now take up the offering.**

Let us pray.

Gift-giving God, we are so fortunate to have received so much.

Help us to remember that all we have received is a gift, is a blessing, is not ours to keep for our own gain. Help us to release our potential, to inspire a world to come together, to seek new life in you.

Amen.<sup>6</sup>

### **Hymn:**

608 STF – All praise to our redeeming Lord OR

731 STF – When, in our music, God is glorified

### **Blessing**

We leave this place knowing that we are not alone, but we walk day by day in the presence of our God.

We leave this place aware of our need for each other, to enjoy our friendships, and the companionship granted from the expression of our love.

We leave this place full of love.

Amen.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker

<sup>7</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker