

**Gloucestershire Methodist Circuit
Prerecorded Service**

14 March 2021

Led by Alison Jackson

Introduction

Welcome to our service!

Whoever you are, wherever you are, whenever you are, it is a delight to join with you in worshipping our one God. Let us start by stilling ourselves before God.

Hymn; StF 18 – Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am God.
Be still and know that I am God.
Be still and know that I am God.

I am the Lord who saves and heals.
I am the Lord who saves and heals.
I am the Lord who saves and heals.

In you, O Lord, I put my trust.
In you, O Lord, I put my trust.
In you, O Lord, I put my trust.

Prayer of approach - “In every breath”

A prayer by Jan Sutch Pickard, a member of the Iona Community and a former Vice President of Conference. ©Jan Sutch Pickard 2020

Take a breath

God, our Maker, you shaped humanity
and breathed life into your creation.
Generation after generation
you bring us to being and breathe life into us –
your children –
you see all the good that is in us.

Take a breath

And we see how good it is,
good that we can live full and fulfilled lives;
good when there is fullness of life for all,
for each of your children –
food and shelter, fresh air and health.

Take a breath

But we see that things are far from good:
when our chances of life are so unequal,
when those who care for others are at such risk,
when lies from the powerful take our breath away,
when cruelty becomes everyday.
And when good people are taken before their time,
we ask: Where are you God?

Take a breath

Jesus, our Brother, sharing our human lives
and our mortality,
the world saw in you the presence of God.
Your life and death show that God is with us
where innocent people suffer
and struggle for breath, as you did on the cross.
You accompany us at each stage of our lives
with deep compassion,
with anger at injustice.

Take a breath

Holy Spirit, Encourager, you are there
in the care home, in the hospital ward,
behind the counter, behind the mask,
when we're lost for words or overwhelmed by them,
taking to the streets and in the loneliness of lockdown.

Take a breath

You inspire us
with the goodness of our neighbours,
with gifts to serve the good of all,
with the oxygen of hope,
and love that is life-giving.

Take a breath

God-with-us in every breath ...

Take a breath

in every breath.
Amen

Mother's Day

Flower shops and card shops are shut, but there are plenty of opportunities on line and elsewhere to buy things to pamper your mother on Mother's Day. I'm getting loads of them, and my mother died in 1990. I suppose I could forward them to my son, but I don't.

I am always rather embarrassed by Mothers' Day. I wonder whether other mothers feel like that.

I don't think I was a bad mother; we get on extremely well with our son. At the moment it's great that we're seeing more of him than we usually do because he lives alone and we are his support bubble. But when I look back over the last 47 years, as well as the many good times, I also remember the times when I lost my temper with him; the times when I found him too demanding; the times when I just couldn't be bothered to read him yet another story. And later on, I'm not at all sure that I always got the balance between work and family life right.

It doesn't seem to have done him any harm, but I still feel embarrassed on Mothers' Day.

But of course, today isn't Mothers' Day; it's Mothering Sunday.

Yes, we have assimilated the idea of Mothers' Day into Mothering Sunday and it's good to have an opportunity to celebrate our mothers. But Mothering Sunday isn't about mothers, it's about our mother church.

Nothing Sunday was the one Sunday in the year when young people who had gone into service in the local big house were allowed to go back to worship in the church where they had been baptised – their mother church. Obviously this involved visiting their mothers – and father and brothers and sisters and grandparents – and there was a tradition of picking wild flowers on the way to give to your mother and taking a simnel cake baked in the kitchen of the big house. So in effect it was a joyous family time, but that was not the point.

Mothering Sunday is about the roots of our faith, and that is where I am focussing this service. What brought us to faith? What are the strong points of our faith? Where did we come from?

Some of us came to faith a very long time ago. I was born into a Christian family and cannot remember a time when I did not believe. Others came much later, for different reasons and in different ways. We all have different roots and on Mothering Sunday, let's spend time thinking about them.

Hymn StF 692 – Your hand, O God, has guided

Your hand, O God, has guided your flock, from age to age;
the wondrous tale is written, full clear, on every page;
our forebears owned your goodness, and we their deeds record;
and both of this bear witness: one Church, one faith, one Lord.

Your heralds brought glad tidings to greatest, as to least;
they summoned all to hasten and share the great King's feast;
their gospel of redemption, sin pardoned, right restored,
was all in this enfolded: one Church, one faith, one Lord.

Your mercy will not fail us, nor leave your work undone;
with your right hand to help us, the victory shall be won;
and then, by all creation, your name shall be adored,
and this shall be our anthem: one Church, one faith, one Lord.

Readings

Psalm 34: 11-20

Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days,
keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies.
Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their cry;
but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to blot out their name from the earth.
The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.

The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.
The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all;
he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.

John 3 14-21

¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,^[a] ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.^[b]

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ¹⁹ This is the verdict: light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

Reflection

The gospel reading is not the special one for Mothering Sunday, but the one set for the 4th Sunday of Lent in the ordinary course of the lectionary. But as it happens, it takes me right back to my roots.

I was brought up in a very conservative evangelical denomination and had to learn a Bible verse every Sunday; John 3:16 was probably the first.

My roots are in the Bible; the church was wholly based on Scripture and always going back to it to justify its church order..

I have moved some distance from what I was taught as a child, but I will always value the knowledge of the Bible that my upbringing gave me. We read it every day at home round the breakfast table, with my sister or me reading the Bible passage and my father reading the notes we used and praying. It seemed to me rather a meaningless ritual, but the Bible was always there

I was taught to study it and ask what it meant. We moved house when I was 6 but continued attending the same church. There were no young people of our age, so my sister and I went to the youth group in a church nearer our home on Saturday evening and for the Sunday evening service and home group, which was always a Bible Study.

Interestingly enough in that environment, this gave me the confidence to disagree with the person teaching me – as long as it wasn't my father! The youth group leader believed that a detailed reading of Daniel and Revelation would enable us to know the date of the second coming. But when my sister and I told my father that was what we were doing, he said that was wrong because Jesus had said that no one would know the time. So I had permission to disagree with the leader on that topic – and I extended it to others as well.

I also extended it to the headmistress at school, who taught us Religious Knowledge. She was very liberal and another pupil (a Methodist) and I knew enough of the Bible to argue with her. As we all disliked her, the rest of the class enjoyed the conflict. To be fair, she did not try to squash us, although she was well able to do so in normal circumstances, and we always thought we had won – not the right way to approach a discussion of the Bible, but we were teenagers.

Finally, I will always value that when my parents made me do things or forbade things; they always had a reason based on the Bible which they could tell me. Even “Because I say so” was rooted in the 5th commandment to honour your parents. So although like any teenager I thought they were being wholly unreasonable, at least I knew that they were not being arbitrary

So these are my roots – where have I grown from them?

I've kept studying the Bible and thinking about it. The plant that has grown is different from that which grew from my parents' roots, and from my sister, but it still has its roots in the Bible.

The most obvious change is that have abandoned some of prohibitions and rules – but from what I believe is a deeper understanding of what the Spirit is saying through the Bible rather than a complete rejection of what I was taught. A friend at university was brought up as strictly as I was but the only reason her parents gave her for their rules was “What would the neighbours think ?” She – rightly – decided that this wasn't a good reason but she had nothing to replace it and ended up in the drug scene and dropping out. My approach was “I think my parents were wrong about what the Bible means”, but I stayed with it in deciding how I should behave instead.

But I have also moved on from some of the doctrinal attitudes which my parents told me stemmed from those roots.

Let's go back to John 3 16 – the verse which my parents stressed as the fundamental statement of faith.

I still accept that, but my understanding of what it means to believe in Jesus and to have eternal life is rather different from what I was taught as a child. Rather than believing a set of facts, I now think it is about trusting a person; and as the kingdom of God is among us, I believe that in some way or other, I already have eternal life rather than just going to heaven when I die. I've still got a long way to go in understanding that, but healthy pants keep on growing,

So those are my roots and a little of how I have grown from them. Yours will be different – some a little different, some very different. But on this Mothering Sunday, I urge you to think about the place, the people, the ideas in which you are rooted and give thanks for them and the plant that has grown from them.

But for all of us – wherever we started and however we have grown - the tap root is and must be our relationship with God through Jesus. There are lots of metaphors to describe how we come to God through Jesus and we might express that differently from each other, and differently from the way it is expressed in our next hymn. But however we understand it and whatever language we use to describe it, that is where our faith is grounded.

Hymn: Mission Praise 473 – My hope is built on nothing less

My hope is built on nothing less
than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
no merit of my own I claim,
but wholly trust in Jesus' name.

*On Christ, the solid rock, I stand -
all other ground is sinking sand,
all other ground is sinking sand.*

When weary in this earthly race,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
in every wild and stormy gale
my anchor holds and will not fail.

*On Christ, the solid rock, I stand -
all other ground is sinking sand,
all other ground is sinking sand.*

His vow, His covenant and blood
are my defence against the flood;
when earthly hopes are swept away
He will uphold me on that day.

*On Christ, the solid rock, I stand -
all other ground is sinking sand,
all other ground is sinking sand.*

When the last trumpet's voice shall sound,
O may I then in Him be found!
clothed in His righteousness alone,
faultless to stand before His throne.

*On Christ, the solid rock, I stand -
all other ground is sinking sand,
all other ground is sinking sand.*

Prayers of Intercession

A prayer by John Pritchard from “The Intercessions Handbook” © John Pritchard 1997

Lord of Lent, come to your Church and ask us your hard questions. Are we faithfully proclaiming your gospel? Are we demonstrating in our life together the justice of your Kingdom? Have we welcomed the weak and given prominence to the poor? Come to your Church to spring-clean our ways of life, our structures and our priorities. Point out

to us the cobwebs, the dirt, the extravagance and the waste. Create in us a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within us.

Lord of Lent

renew our lives.

Lord of Lent, come to the nations and challenge our idolatries.

Spring-clean the sordid cupboard of this world's false gods. Sweep out the false pride, the self-seeking, the deceit, the corruption and lies. May the kingdoms of this earth seek justice, peace and the integrity of creation. May we look beyond immediate advantage to seek the common good, and be drawn to it, as a lark to the dawn.

[Especially we ask for your cleansing hand in . . .]

Lord of Lent

renew our lives.

Lord of Lent, look with compassion on those whose minds are full of anxiety and bewilderment. We remember people who are lonely, imprisoned, despairing and humiliated. Clear away from them all unnecessary feelings of fear, guilt and self-hatred. Assure them that when you spring-clean our hearts and minds you know what you are doing, for you have been there, one of us, and you are to be trusted.

Lord of Lent

renew our lives.

Lord of Lent, turn your healing love towards those who are sick and in pain today. We have in our hearts some known to us, some known to the Church, and some known only through the news.

We bring them to mind now . . . Clear away from them, we pray, those things that hurt, harm and hinder them. May your healing touch still have its ancient power.

Lord of Lent

renew our lives.

For ourselves, Lord, we pray that your spring-clean would be thorough and true this Lent. Show us clearly those effortless sins we no longer even notice, and help us to address the sins which sit on our shoulder every day, our constant companions. Give us both discipline in dealing with some faults and gentleness in dealing with others, and help us to know the difference. Create in us a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within us.

Lord of Lent

renew our lives.

Renew our Church, renew our world, renew our hearts, our cleansing Lord of Lent.

Amen.

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.

Hymn StF 545 – Be thou my vision

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art;
be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;
be thou my great Father, thy child let me be;
be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise:
be thou mine inheritance now and always;
be thou and thou only the first in my heart:
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun,
O grant me its joys after victory is won;
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

Close

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

In work and worship

God is with us

Gathered and scattered

God is with us

Now and always

God is with us