

## Sunday 8 May

### Call to Worship for Mothers' Day

(based on themes from Psalm 139)

We've come to worship God,  
who loved us before we were yet born,  
who knows us even better than we know ourselves,  
whose presence never leaves us,  
and whose love for us never ceases.

This is our God.

Let's worship together!

**Opening Hymn:** For the beauty of the earth WOV #77

### Opening Prayers:

Living God,  
we worship You.

We bless You for Your love  
which will not fail us.

As a shepherd gathers their flock  
so, Good Shepherd, You gather us here today  
to feed and refresh us.

Some of us come rejoicing  
because our path has led through green pastures;  
some come battered and bruised by life  
because our path has led through dark and frightening valleys.  
We need to know Your strength restoring our souls;  
some of us, like foolish sheep, come before You ashamed  
because we have wandered astray instead of following You  
and now we come seeking Your forgiveness.

Thank You that in Your grace  
and through the Lord Jesus  
You seek us out,  
You find us,  
You help us,  
and give us now joy and hope.

We hear Your call  
to care for others as You care for us,  
to love as You love,  
to give and go on giving,  
to heal, to feed,  
to nurture and reconcile.

Help us to show our thankfulness  
not only in our praise and prayers,  
but by following You  
in the way of self-sacrificing love,  
bringing others to give thanks and love You too.

Meet with us by Your Spirit.

Make us one.

Lead us in Your ways  
for Your glory.

Amen

### **Confession**

Father

Forgive us when we stray  
and bring us back;

forgive us for all Your wandering sheep  
that are not found;

forgive us for those who are driven from the fold  
and scattered

because of something we said or did or failed to do;

for those who have been left hurt,  
bewildered and afraid.

Forgive us when the hungry sheep look up  
and are not fed;

forgive us when the sheep are tired  
and we do not give them rest;

forgive us when they stray into danger  
and we do not seek them out;

forgive us when we do not care  
for others in the fold.

Forgive us and change us.  
Oh let us be changed,  
in the name of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd.  
Amen

### **Prayers of Confession:**

Psalm 103:8-12

The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbour his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

**Hymn: Because you came HIOS #10** (click [here](#) for words)

Readings:

**Proverbs 3:13-18**      New Revised Standard Version

### **The True Wealth**

- <sup>13</sup> Happy are those who find wisdom,  
and those who get understanding,  
<sup>14</sup> for her income is better than silver,  
and her revenue better than gold.  
<sup>15</sup> She is more precious than jewels,  
and nothing you desire can compare with her.  
<sup>16</sup> Long life is in her right hand;  
in her left hand are riches and honour.  
<sup>17</sup> Her ways are ways of pleasantness,  
and all her paths are peace.  
<sup>18</sup> She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her;  
those who hold her fast are called happy.

### **The Worship God Demands**

**66** Thus says the LORD:

Heaven is my throne  
and the earth is my footstool;  
what is the house that you would build for me,  
and what is my resting place?

<sup>2</sup> All these things my hand has made,  
and so all these things are mine,<sup>[a]</sup>  
says the LORD.

But this is the one to whom I will look,  
to the humble and contrite in spirit,  
who trembles at my word.

<sup>3</sup> Whoever slaughters an ox is like one who kills a human being;  
whoever sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck;  
whoever presents a grain offering, like one who offers swine's blood;<sup>[b]</sup>  
whoever makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who  
blesses an idol.

These have chosen their own ways,  
and in their abominations they take delight;

<sup>4</sup> I also will choose to mock<sup>[c]</sup> them,  
and bring upon them what they fear;  
because, when I called, no one answered,  
when I spoke, they did not listen;  
but they did what was evil in my sight,  
and chose what did not please me.

### **The LORD Vindicates Zion**

<sup>5</sup> Hear the word of the LORD,  
you who tremble at his word:  
Your own people who hate you  
and reject you for my name's sake  
have said, "Let the LORD be glorified,  
so that we may see your joy";  
but it is they who shall be put to shame.

<sup>6</sup> Listen, an uproar from the city!  
A voice from the temple!  
The voice of the LORD,  
dealing retribution to his enemies!

<sup>7</sup> Before she was in labour  
she gave birth;  
before her pain came upon her  
she delivered a son.

<sup>8</sup> Who has heard of such a thing?

Who has seen such things?  
Shall a land be born in one day?  
Shall a nation be delivered in one moment?  
Yet as soon as Zion was in labour  
she delivered her children.

<sup>9</sup> Shall I open the womb and not deliver?  
says the LORD;  
shall I, the one who delivers, shut the womb?  
says your God.

<sup>10</sup> Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her,  
all you who love her;  
rejoice with her in joy,  
all you who mourn over her—

<sup>11</sup> that you may nurse and be satisfied  
from her consoling breast;  
that you may drink deeply with delight  
from her glorious bosom.

<sup>12</sup> For thus says the LORD:  
I will extend prosperity to her like a river,  
and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream;  
and you shall nurse and be carried on her arm,  
and dandled on her knees.

<sup>13</sup> As a mother comforts her child,  
so I will comfort you;  
you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

### **John 10:22-30**

At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. So, the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered, “I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my father’s name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater

than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

### **Reflection:**

In our holy scriptures there are many stories of the role that mothers and mother figures played in the sharing the story of God.

The scripture as found in John 19:25

*Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," 27 and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.*

shows the centrality of mothers and women to the story of the death of Jesus.

And our world likes to pay tribute to the role of mothers in our lives, it is also a good excuse to sell a few more flowers, or to hold yet another sale. I get emails regularly from Mitre10 and from car parts retailers and they all sent me reminders of what they thought would be great Mothers' Day gifts. I think if you take out the kitchen items and cleaning tools (which mothers might not really want for gifts) most things on offer would probably appeal more to the fathers...

But for some Mothers' Day is another day to avoid, to not look forward to. As humans our relationships are often difficult, and Mothers' Day may illuminate our brokenness. This includes people whose mothers are no longer alive. Mothers who feel inadequate, worried, & fearful for their children. Mothers whose children have died. People who did not have a good relationship with their mothers. People who live a long way from their mothers or whose families have broken up. And women who would like to have been or who would like to be mothers. Just like Fathers' Day, these days can be challenging for some. Often not helped by the church's often over glorification of the day with out naming the challenges that the day brings to some.

As a parent, I think we all wish for the perfect child, well behaved, and it would be nice if they went to bed at a reasonable hour. We may have said if only they were better behaved that would have made my life easier.

Mary had a perfect son Jesus. And yet her mothering was anything but easy.

When Jesus was born she was young, inexperienced and ostracised because of his conception. Her baby was born far from home in difficult and dangerous surroundings. When she took her son to the temple, only days old, Simeon's prophecy for his future was both ominous and exciting. He prophesied that a sword would pierce her soul. She then lived as a refugee in a foreign land because the King wanted to kill her child. Jesus was different as a child. At 12 years old he stopped behind in Jerusalem to discuss theology.

When he was older and his peers were getting married and having children, which was obligatory, Jesus did not. It could not have been easy for Mary to have Jesus being single and still living at home. His public ministry alienated him from his family as well as the religious leaders. Mary had to learn to put her own feelings to one side to support him in his mission. Finally, she suffered the worst thing that can happen to a mother, she had to watch her son die a long, painful, tortuous death. For a Jew there was no more shameful way to die than to be on a cross. Men were crucified naked, something the Jews found shameful.

But Mary was there. Supporting her son, no doubt with many emotions and thoughts racing around. And there was Jesus.

Jesus was on the cross because humankind couldn't cope with God, so they resorted to violence, murder. Jesus endured the suffering of the cross and was watched by those who loved him.

When we suffer, we can concentrate on ourselves? Jesus didn't. Even in pain on the cross he is thinking of others. All those who he died for. But also, two people in front of him. He asks Mary to adopt John as her son, and John to adopt Mary as his mother. They obeyed and John took Mary into his home. Through Jesus' death new relationships are created.

As we look towards our Gospel reading for today, we are reminded of other imagery that is so familiar, that of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Of course, throughout Jesus' ministry questions about who Jesus was arose. Jesus' mother Mary had insight into who Jesus was, right from when the angel first visited her to bring her the good news. But for many the way in which Jesus was working and being, led to more questions. Jesus' answer

didn't exactly answer their questions satisfactorily He answers by telling them he has already told them, in word and deed. How exasperated those gathered probably felt by his response! Of course this answer and what they saw of Jesus didn't match their expectations at all. Their idea of Messiah and the biblical idea of messiah were just not connecting.

Jesus adds this layer to why it wasn't connecting for those that were expecting Jesus to be their idea of Messiah. In verse 26 he says, "you do not believe because you do not belong to my sheep."

But don't we all belong to God? Are we not all connected to God because he created us?

There seem to be a number of ways that we (and the created world) might belong to God. We *all* belong in the sense that we are all creatures who have been made by the Creator. But Jesus' words here point to a different kind of belonging, a belonging that has re-oriented one's life, one's view of the world and the way things should (and can be). It is a belonging founded upon, flowing through, and dependent upon Jesus the Christ as the good shepherd.

Belonging to the good shepherd Jesus is central: "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me." And notice that the sheep do not belong simply because they exist; their belonging is an active belonging: hearing, following, being known (i.e., having experiences of Jesus), and being given eternal life. Our belonging to the shepherd, needs to be active too, we need to pray, to worship, to read scripture and to stay connected to the one that knows our name, we need to be listening for when we are called by name.

Following Jesus, listening to his voice, letting ourselves be known by him—and therefore having experiences that allow us to know Jesus—this is a further description of the Easter Resurrection new life calling we've been hearing since we celebrated the resurrection of Christ at Easter. The same power that sustains everything, including God's own self, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, is the same power that allows us to recognize the Saviour's voice, to know intimately our good God, and to follow after him.

The Good Shepherd tells us that everything depends on belonging to him. Never does our status before God depend on how we feel, on having the



right experience, on being free of doubt, or on what we accomplish. It depends on one thing only: that we are known by the shepherd: “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish” (John 10:28).

The voice of the Good Shepherd is a voice that liberates rather than oppresses. It does not say, “Do this, and then maybe you will be good enough to be one of my sheep.” It says, “You belong to me already. No one can snatch you out of my hand.” Secure in this belonging, we are free to live the abundant life of which Jesus spoke earlier in the chapter: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

The abundant life of which Jesus speaks is not necessarily about abundance in years, or in wealth, or status, or accomplishments. It is life that is abundant in the love of God made known in Jesus Christ, love that overflows to others (John 13:34-35). It is eternal life because its source is in God who is eternal (17:3), and in Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life (11:25-26).

Amidst all the other voices that evoke fear, make demands, or give advice, the voice of the good shepherd is a voice of promise — a voice that calls us by name and claims us as God’s own.

**Hymn of Reflection:** The king of love my shepherd is WOV #81

**Prayers Of Intercession:**

As a community,  
we take time to pause and give thanks for the gift of mothers.  
Shining a light on the gift, shadows fall,  
and we acknowledge the shadows, too.

We celebrate and give thanks, each of us, for our mother.  
The woman who carried us in her womb, gave birth to us, brought us into life.

We lament, each of us, separation from our mother at different times,  
through conflict, distance of place, death.

We lament, seek to forgive and be forgiven.

We celebrate and give thanks, each of us,  
for those who have been as mothers to us;  
our aunts and pseudo-aunts, big sisters, friends, mentors and teachers.

The women who have nurtured, taught, encouraged, shaped us with love.  
We lament, each of us, the women who have caused us pain,  
who have abandoned or neglected us,  
mistakenly or intentionally caused us harm.  
We lament the hurt we have caused to women,  
our friends, colleagues, neighbours, sisters, aunts and mothers.  
We lament, seek to forgive and be forgiven.  
We celebrate and give thanks, together,  
for the women in our communities.  
That women and men are different invites us into partnership,  
invites us to share the burdens and the joys of life.  
For the many strengths of women, their gifts of peace-making,  
nurture, education, entrepreneurship, healing, wisdom,  
creativity, endurance, collaboration, physicality –  
and so much more, we are grateful.  
We lament, together, that women are still discounted  
because they are women, in our culture and in others.  
That the difference between women and men is seen as threatening,  
a power struggle, a competition or a hierarchy, is not, we know,  
your dream for us.  
We lament, seek to forgive and be forgiven.  
We celebrate, those of us who are mothers and grandmothers,  
the joy and privilege it is to collaborate with you in the creation of life.  
We give thanks for our children, their uniqueness,  
the delight we find in watching and helping them grow.  
We lament, those of us who are not mothers and want to be,  
or who are mothers of children who have died.  
We lament, and have no words for our grief.  
We celebrate, we give thanks, for you, our mothering God,  
whose wings enfold us like those of a mother hen,  
who gives birth to all that lives,  
who loves fiercely, protectively, and with great delight.  
We celebrate what we know of you as like a mother.  
We lament our turning from you and causing you pain,

our rejection of your gifts of life and love in so many ways.  
We seek your forgiveness again and again.

Again and again, God welcomes us home,  
as a mother welcomes her children.

Again and again, God celebrates us, God's children,  
and delights in watching and helping us grow.

Come, now, under the wings of God; come, now, into the warmth of  
Love. You are forgiven. You are loved. Precious child of your Mothering  
God.

written by Reverend Sarah Agnew.

**Closing Hymn:** God who weeps HIOS #52 (click [here](#) for words)

**Benediction:**

*"As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you"*

Go now in the comfort and peace of the One who gave birth to us.

Go in the assurance that the Comforter is with us always.

Go to give comfort and peace to others. Divine Wisdom guide us as we go  
forth on Her paths of peace.

*May She give us blessings more precious than silver or gold*

May we find joy in sharing these blessings with others.

May Wisdom empower us to change our world! Amen.

Andrew Howley

08.05.2022

CCLI Licence 288039