Mothering Sunday

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Mothering Sunday guide

Every single day The Children’s Society work with the most vulnerable children in our society, we provide the extra mothering they need to be cared for.

Mothering Sunday is no exception. But it is a special day because it is a day of recognition and celebration. It is a day to recognise and celebrate the blessing that those who care for us provide. But it is also a day to recognise the plight of some children and teenagers in our country who need our love and care. Mothering Sunday is a day to proclaim ambitious dreams for every child across our nation. Dreams we can bring to life throughout the rest of the year.

We’ve put together a wide range of resources to help you recognise and celebrate Mothering Sunday with your whole congregation. The resources focus on the gospel reading, John 19.25-27, providing background to the Scripture and insightful sermon ideas. Naturally there is also a variety of all age service ideas to choose from, ideas to use with children and a broad variety of prayers to suit your congregation.

So what are you waiting for?

This Mothering Sunday and throughout the year we can work together to offer a lifeline to children to ensure the gap between the children’s needs and what they are able to access is narrowed. Together we share in the ‘mothering’ of children, wrapping a blanket of care and future possibilities around them.
Introduction

When Jesus presents his mother to the ‘disciple who Jesus loved’ and vice versa at the foot of the cross, a new family was formed. This family comes out of a place of tragedy, of love and of faith. On Mothering Sunday we celebrate ‘family’ in all its forms. We recognise those who give of themselves to care for others, and we remember those who are in the midst of struggles or suffering.

John 19.25-27

Standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, here is your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

Background to the Scripture reading

There is some debate as to the details of the women at the cross. Who are they exactly? Is one the mother of James? Are there three or four women there? The important thing though is that they are there, at the foot of the cross. They put themselves in danger by being so public at this point, in a way that the disciples couldn’t bring themselves to do. They were afraid. The women’s unfailing support and love of Jesus lead them to overcome their fears and be near Jesus in his suffering and shame.

And none more so than his mother, Mary. How heart-breaking for her to be so close to her precious son’s agony. This is love – to put yourself in the place of another’s suffering and to not step away, whatever that may cost you.

And Jesus mirrors this love, when right at the heart of his turmoil, He sets his heart and mind on protecting the needs and future of his mother, and a new family is born.

These two acts of sacrificial love challenge us in our care of one other, of those who suffer, of those who grieve, not only in our immediate families but to all in need.

Two sermon ideas

1. Facing an uncertain future

- In between Christmas and Easter, John 19.25-27 reminds us of both these events.
- We see Jesus on the cross, alongside Mary coming face to face with the prophetic words of Simeon when her son was still a baby:

   ‘This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul, too’ (Luke 2.34-35).
Peter and Jane's story

Peter and Jane were preparing to become adoptive parents and were given a folder to read the stories of some of the children available. They read how young Sam was a loving child but had a very uncertain future. The social workers wanted any adopter to understand what they were taking on. Peter and Jane were put off at first, and then realised that no parent knows what is in store and they deal with things as they happen. Sam is now an important part of the new family they have created as Peter and Jane have gone on to adopt two more amazing children.

Consider how you deal with uncertainty; are you motivated by faith or fear?

Pause for thought

- As a church how do your programmes, groups and timings help or hinder families of different contexts within your community?
- How do we help each other understand ‘different’ types of families eg step, adopted, foster, those supporting children with extra needs, single parents, other family members taking parental roles, working, unemployed, etc.?

Chris’s Story

Chris was a 12-year-old boy who displayed extreme behavioural and emotional issues both at school and home. He attributed this to a turbulent, chaotic childhood and home life, as a result of domestic and alcohol abuse. Due to his anti-social behaviour, lack of empathy for others and outbursts of anger, Chris's learning support mentor referred him to The Children's Society Youth Inclusion programme. He’s been able to continue his studies and earned a place at college where he hopes to learn the skills to eventually set up his own business. He also hopes to volunteer for The Children's Society to help other children who have had the kind of tough upbringing he had.

Chris said, 'I've been through hell since I was small. I've been through things and seen things not even adults should have seen.' ‘I’m now hoping to start volunteering with The Children’s Society myself, so I can use my experience in a positive way to help other children who have had the kind of tough upbringing I did.’

- Jesus challenges us to reconsider who we call family. Does Chris’s story challenge you to reconsider those who may be outcast because of their anti-social behaviour?
- God’s love always transforms, even in the darkest places, as shown in today’s reading. Chris has been transformed; how can we show this love, even in the darkest places?
2. True family

John’s passage suggests how Jesus views family:

- Even at this point, Jesus thinks about Mary and her future by making provision for her.
- Despite Jesus having brothers, he asks one of his disciples to take her into his home.
- Perhaps because he wanted her to be cared for spiritually, by a favoured disciple.
  - Who have been our spiritual parents/guides?
  - How do we spiritually support others?
  - How do we encourage each other in this?
- A new family is formed in this passage. Now more than ever, families come in all shapes and sizes. We need to work hard to understand and support each other’s families.

How do we, as the Church support important organisations, like The Children's Society, who provide such vital support, research and campaigning for children and families?

- Jesus appears to count God’s family as just as important as blood ties (cf 1 John 3)
  - How do we support each other?
  - How could we improve?
  - How do we learn how to give love and importantly, receive it too?
- What do we want to celebrate about our church family? Take the chance to thank children’s and youth workers and encourage them in their roles. Acknowledge anyone who volunteers, takes interest in and encourages children and families in your church.
- Jesus helps us to understand what God’s love looks like – and no more so than in this passage. May we reflect that love to one another – in our families, our church, our community and beyond.

Give your congregation the opportunity to be generous towards disadvantaged children in our nation by taking a collection for The Children's Society*.

* You can send a cheque to Supporter Services, The Children's Society, Edward Rudolf House, Margery Street, London, WC1X 0JL.

All age suggestions

1. Welcome

As you introduce the service, ask anyone who is a mother to stand up and when they have, say simply, ‘Welcome. This service is for you.’ Now ask those who are fathers, aunts or uncles to stand, and again, when they have, say ‘Welcome. This service is for you.’ Repeat this for: a sister or a brother, a godparent, and then, a daughter or a son. Don’t rush this process. When everyone is standing at the end briefly explain that whilst today is Mothering Sunday, we want to celebrate all those who care, and are cared for, and our place in God’s family and his heart.
2. The shape of family

You will need: A blob of play-dough, salt dough or plasticine for each person
Ask everyone to mould a shape that represents the word 'love'. Give some time for this, and then see what people have done. (If you have the technology you could go around with a video camera and put a live feed onto a big screen for everyone to see)
Note the common themes, eg hearts.
Now ask everyone to mould a shape to represent the word ‘family’ and again have a look at what people have done.
Note how very different these sculptures are. That’s the same with the shape of each of our families, and even our views as to what family means.
Consider together what Jesus's view of family is.

3. What did I say?

In small groups, think of the funny things that our mums, or grandmothers, or teachers, say or used to say. Encourage the older adults particularly to share these with the younger ones – see how many they recognise! Include warnings, words of endearment and old wives tales.
After giving some time for this, ask everyone how many of them have ever heard themselves using those phrases that they used to hear!
(If you have the means to, there are a couple of excellent clips on Youtube eg Frozen's Let It Go – A Mom's Parody, and the particularly excellent The Mom Song sung to the William Tell Overture).
Then pose the question, ‘What are the sayings of Jesus that we can remember that help us know how to live our lives?’ Give time in the groups to discuss, then hear people’s ideas (eg love your neighbour as you love yourself, blessed are the poor, for such as you did for the least of these my children you did for me.
Imagine how life would be if we actually made these phrases and ideas our own!

4. In memoriam

You will need: to make sure that everyone, not just the mothers, have a flower.
If your church is in the habit of giving out small bunches of daffodils (or if the children have made them as suggested in the ideas to use with children!) on Mothering Sunday, have an empty vase at the front of church, with the words ‘In Memoriam’ next to or in front of it.
Recognising that this can be a difficult day for many, due to bereavement in particular, invite everyone to take one of their flowers and come and place it in the vase during a quiet worship song or piece of music. Keep the invitation general – for someone that they miss today, afterwards say a prayer thanking God for those remembered.
Ideas to use with children

1. **Mini bouquets**

If your church is in the habit of giving out small bunches of flowers why not get the children to assemble them? In the spirit of celebrating all parenting and care, give them to everyone who wants one, not just the mothers.

*You will need:* spring flowers (daffodils are best and cheapest!), greenery, scissors, ribbons, prepared card labels.

- Explain to the group the importance of saying thank you. This activity is a way of doing that.
- Everyone should take three or four so flowers and a bit of greenery. Cut a piece of ribbon to tie them together and thread a prepared label with the ribbon (suggested wording: Made for you with love and thanks, by the children of...).
- Repeat the process until you have enough everyone who might want them. Say a prayer, asking God to make these flower gifts and blessing to those who will receive them.
- If you have a mixed age group you can have more of a production line, with the younger ones picking the flowers and greenery and passing them to the older ones for the trickier parts.

2. **Show me, thank you game**

- Ask the children to suggest some of the jobs that need doing around the house, or to look after them, eg cleaning windows, vacuuming, cooking food, ironing, reading together, gardening, shopping (you may need to prompt them!).
- Think of an action for each activity.
- Discuss who does these jobs. Keep this discussion general and don’t question their answers. Ask the children if they ever thank these people for doing so much?
- Add in a loud action for ‘thank you’ (eg star jump, shouting ‘thank you’).
- Play the game, with you calling out the different jobs in a random order with the children doing the appropriate action, and including ‘thank you’ at regular intervals.
- At the end of the game, remind the children to thank the people they have mentioned.

3. **Heart together**

A simple craft to help the children reflect on those who love and help them.

*You will need:* A pencil & two pieces of card (A5) for each child, plus sellotape, stapler and felt tips/pencil crayons.
• Invite each of the children to draw as large a heart as possible on one of the cards. This can be left or shaded in pencil crayon. Explain that God's heart is so big that he uses other people to help us know what his love is like.

• On the other card, ask the children to write down, or draw, the people who help them in their lives. Encourage them to think about family, friends, school, church and clubs. Write or draw them near the middle of the card.

• Staple the two sides of the card together with the pictures on the outside, and the pencil in the middle in between. Use the sellotape to secure the card.

• Let the children spin the pencil between their hands and see how the two pictures merge, to show how the people that care for us are within the heart of God.

• You might like to say a prayer thanking God for showing his love through those people.

Prayers and intercessions

1. **A collect prayer for formal services**
   As Christ showed his love on the cross, in his compassion for his mother and his sacrifice for us all, may we know what it is to love and be loved, in words and in actions.
   May we reflect God's love in our families, our church and our community; so that the world can see that we are followers of Christ and children of the most High God, and draw others into his loving care.
   Amen.

2. **A prayer for children who are in need**
   Into your loving arms, loving God, we place those children in need today.
   You see behind the front doors, and the headlines, and the fronts we can all create, to the reality that is so often hidden.
   We pray for those children whose reality is difficult, for those who live in poverty, in turmoil, or in fear, and those who support them.
   We pray for all the children and families supported by The Children's Society, through the different services and centres – for those in care, for refugee children, for young carers, for those who have run away from home, for those whose lives are affected by drugs or alcohol, for children living with disabilities, for traveller children and for those who live in danger of abuse.
   We thank you, God, that these vulnerable children are known and named by you, we thank you that help is there for them through agencies like The Children's Society, and they are not invisible. We pray that you will give those working with these children and families wisdom, insight, patience, professionalism and something more of your heart.
May lives be changed, the past redeemed and the future become one of hope.
Amen.

3. **A prayer for mothers in difficulties**
   We pray for all mothers who are struggling to be the parent they want to be.
   We pray for the barriers that face them and the chains that ensnare, whether that be past experiences, circumstance, or difficult choices.
   We pray for mothers who are grieving today, or who face the daily battle of illness.
   Where there is darkness, may you bring light, where there is despair, may you bring hope, where there is turmoil, may you bring peace.
   And where your love is needed most, call forth people who can carry that to all those mothers who need it today.
   Amen.

4. **A prayer of thanks**
   Thank you Lord for all who care
   *Bless them with your love*
   Thanks for mothers everywhere
   *Bless them with your love*

   For those who brighten up our day
   *Bless them with your love*
   Who always have the right words to say
   *Bless them with your love*

   Thanks for hugs, and love and smiles
   *Bless them with your love*
   Thanks for all those extra miles
   *Bless them with your love*

   And when they feel they're not enough
   *Bless them, bless them, with your love*

5. **Four prayers of intercession**
   Father God,
   We thank you that you have created and called us as your children.
   You have shown us your love in Jesus
   And opened your arms to welcome us home.
   Help us to understand more of your love,
   Its breadth and depth, it's fathering and mothering,
   And as we rest in its abundance and infinity
   Give us generous hearts to share your love with others
Thank you for always being there for us,

Hear us, God our Father

Nurturing God,
We thank you for those people you put in our lives
Who have cared for us and guided us.
We pray for all those in mothering roles,
Those who find great joy in this, and those who struggle.
May they turn to you for all they need – patience, love, peace.
Protect them from the damage of comparisons,
And help us to recognise what we can offer.
So that all children can reach the potential you have set in them,
And know your love through others.

Thank you for always being there for us,
Hear us, God our Father

Compassionate God,
We thank you that you do not judge as the world judges,
You do not show favour to status or wealth.
Instead, your heart is for the poor and the vulnerable,
And you call us to be the same.
Open our eyes to the needs of those around us,
Take away our judgements and enlarge our understanding.
May we be ever mindful of the grace we have received,
And extend that grace to others.

Thank you for always being there for us,
Hear us, God our Father

Challenging God,
We thank you for all those who work to bring justice for all children,
For those whose working lives, professional and unpaid,
Is given to bringing out the potential of each one.
Give them the voice to call out the good from each in their care,
And the words to challenge the structures that create barriers and injustice,
And may we open our ears to hear the message they tell,
Our eyes to the reality of so many in our midst
And our hearts to act on behalf of them.

Thank you for always being there for us,
Hear us, God our Father
### 6. A meditative reflection- the shape of families

Could be used as a ‘pause for thought’ during a range of styles of service, on its own or in conjunction with the shape of family activity from the all age service ideas.

**You will need:** a blob of plasticine, play-dough or salt dough for each person

*Invite everyone to hold the dough, cupped in their hands*

From the very beginning, God held his creation in his hands. He brooded over it like a mother, cradled it like a precious gift. Think about those things that you hold precious in your life. As you know how much you love them, know how much God loves this world.

*Invite everyone to mould the shape of a person.*

And at the very centre of his creation were his people, his children. And he held them in his hands, and looked at them with love, even when they got things so wrong.

Think about the people who love, and have shown you love in your life. Thank God for each of them, and the ones he has given into your care. Hold them in your prayers and heart for a few moments. And at the very centre of each person is their heart. The place where love and life flows from.

*Invite everyone to reform their person to make a heart shape.*

And to each of his children he gave that most fragile and precious of all gifts – the ability to give and receive love. What we do with that gift is in our hands. Spend a few moments holding the heart in your up-turned hand. If you feel able, pray, giving God your heart – your plans, your hopes, your dreams and your fears, and most of all your love.

Thank you, loving parent, for all your good gifts to us, your children. May we hold them carefully enough to acknowledge their value, and lightly enough to offer them back to you.

Amen.

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Every week thousands of Christians around the country unite with us to pray for transformation in the lives of disadvantaged children in our nation. Sign up to join them and hear about our latest worship resources:

[www.childrenssociety.org.uk/prayeremail](http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/prayeremail)

Why not help transform lives of disadvantaged children in our nation through The Children’s Society:

[www.childrenssociety.org.uk/give](http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/give)

Or text CHILD to 70020 to donate £3*

* You will be charged £3 plus one message at your standard network rate. The Children’s Society will receive 100% of your donation. Full terms and conditions online: childrenssociety.org.uk