

Salford Methodist Circuit



4rd Sunday in Lent - Mothering Sunday - 14th March 2021

Rev Kim Ratcliffe

Welcome to the Salford Methodist Circuit on this fourth Sunday of Lent that also coincides with Mothering Sunday that we know here in Britain.

Bible Reading: Isaiah 42 : 14 & 66 : 9

*For a long time I have kept silent,
I have been quiet and held myself back. (as God was present as the birth
of His creation happened, at one point he stood back to look before he
spoke).
But now like a woman in childbirth,
I cry out, I gasp and pant.
Do I bring to the moment of birth
And not give delivery: says the Lord. (As well as standing back after the
birth of the universe, God was present at birth of his Son and present at
the birth of the the Mother Church*

As our ever- present God looked ahead knowing that as His creation was now in existence and "It was good" He put His trust in us to be good caretakers of His creation. As the birth of the Mother Church happened as time went on, our ever present, all knowing God has put His trust with us to be good caretakers of each individual church that has been given birth to since. The cycle of life is not only birth though. It is life. It is death.

*Do we bring something to the moment of birth
And not give delivery?
Do I close up the womb
when I bring to delivery? Says your God.
Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her.*

God is with us today, we are here because we were born, we are living our lives because we were born. Labour is hard and painful work, if you said to someone about to give birth "stop now, I'm going to go and do something else for a moment" they would not be able to "stop now". When the pain that happens during childbirth is over, there is joy and there is hope.

Mary gave birth to our Lord, from day one she knew that this child would be different, this child wasn't in her plans at that moment in her life. But she knew that God's plans for her life were to be trusted. As she gave birth to Jesus the pain would have been very real in many ways, others would be involved too within this setting and within this family's life. They would marvel at what Jesus would do and they would feel the pain of what He had to do too. Just as at His birth, God would know everything about Him and his family, his friends including those who would share worship with Him; as he knows each of us, our family,

Salford Methodist Circuit



our friends and our worshipping communities. We come before God today to worship Him during this fourth Sunday of Lent.

Bible Reading: Luke 2 : 33 - 35

The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "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."

We come to God in Prayer as we sing with each other and offer ourselves to God.

Hymn: O God, you search me.

O God, you search me and you know me.
All my thoughts lie open to your gaze.
When I walk or lie down you are before me:
ever the maker and keeper of my days.

You know my resting and my rising.
You discern my purpose from afar,
and with love everlasting you besiege me:
in every moment of life or death, you are.
The Wholeness of Creation

Before a word is on my tongue, Lord,
you have known its meaning through and through.
You are with me beyond my understanding:
God of my present, my past and future, too.

Although your Spirit is upon me,
still I search for shelter from your light.
There is nowhere on earth I can escape you:
even the darkness is radiant in your sight.

For you created me and shaped me,
gave me life within my mother's womb.
For the wonder of who I am, I praise you:
safe in your hands, all creation is made new.

Bible Reading: Psalm 34 : 11 - 18

*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.*

Thanks be to God for that word.

100% I don't want anyone to be fearful of anyone, including me and certainly I don't want anyone to be fearful of God! I could describe what it feels like to be fearful of people in my own life and possibly you could too. Fear can take hold of your life if you do not have survival techniques in place. Sometimes these techniques come from us naturally as we learn our own coping strategies throughout life. But sometimes we have a need to be offered the opportunity to work through the situations where you may feel fear because of, possible, the inappropriate behaviour of others.

You may have heard someone say, "they put the fear of God into me!" Why should we be fearful of God? Well, I don't think that we should be. I do think that we need to show reverence to and for God which comes with certain expectations from our behaviour towards God but also towards each other. Mary, the mother of God, I don't know how she must have felt when the Angel appeared to her telling her that she would carry the Son of God within her womb. Perhaps it was fear, the fear of carrying her first child, the fear of telling others. She may have had a belief in God, but I think she must have had a faith in God for her to obey what God was asking of her. For us like Mary we need to obey God. Not because we fear Him but because we have a good relationship with him. We need to speak to others in the way that we would expect and want them to speak to us. If we can't speak to others in a respectful and loving way then how can we expect for people to be respectful and loving to us. The way we treat others too must be high on our priorities. Love your neighbour as yourself. Mary, the mother of the Son of God, wasn't left on her own. God placed into her life people who would be supportive to her and even the Innkeeper, in a strange way, in the end found a space for Mary to bring into the world the Son of God. Not a large fancy room but a humble stable. Mary needed to know that every moment in her life she could rely on God and perhaps even more than ever, at this time of her life as her future was about to change for ever. Mary could have approached the situation with doom and gloom but she embraced the changes about to take place in her life with reverence. She wouldn't in time want to be



going through what we today know she will have to go through as a mother and we can empathise with her as we continue to journey through Lent together.

There is no room in this world for evil to exist, although it does exist in many ways.

We need God, every second, every minute, every hour in the day, to look up to and to come to and to give any fears that we have over to him.

Hymn: I need thee every hour

*I need thee every hour,
most gracious Lord;
no tender voice like thine
can peace afford:
 I need thee, O I need thee,
 every hour I need thee;
 O bless me now, my Saviour;
 I come to thee.*

*I need thee every hour;
stay thou near by;
temptations lose their power
when thou art nigh:
 I need thee, O I need thee,*

*I need thee every hour,
in joy or pain;
come quickly and abide,
or life is vain:
 I need thee, O I need thee,*

*I need thee every hour;
teach me thy will,
and thy rich promises
in me fulfil:
 I need thee, O I need thee,*

Bible Reading: 2 Corinthians 1 : 3 - 7

Praise to the God of All Comfort

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. If we are

Salford Methodist Circuit



distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

I spoke a little bit about 'Mother Church' at the beginning of this service. According to Wikipedia Mother church or matrice, meaning in Collins English Dictionary: womb, mould and matrix, is a term depicting the Christian Church as a mother in her functions of nourishing and protecting the believer.

The first local church in all of Christianity is that of Jerusalem, the site of the Passion of the Christ and of Pentecost, making it the Mother Church of all Christianity.

But from that first church, we have developed physically going into all nations of the world. But with that comes differences as each church, Christian denomination has developed. Different faith's been given birth to and there are people who choose to have no faith or believe in something else.

In Methodism, the Methodist Church of Great Britain is considered the Mother Church by all the other Methodist Churches in the World Methodist Council, with Methodist Central Hall often being a symbol of this tradition. This is because the Methodist Church of Great Britain "gave birth to the whole Methodist enterprise and then of a nineteenth-century church whose influence reached out across the world through the missionary endeavours of the various British Connexions within and beyond the British Empire.

God gave birth to the world in His creation of it. It went wrong, people went their own way instead of being obedient to God. They took their own needs and placed these at the heart of how they behaved, they fell into a place of disobedience to the very God who had created them.

Mary obeyed God, she gave birth to Jesus and, with the help of Joseph, nourished and guided Jesus through the early years of his life knowing that His future was totally in the hands of God the Father. Mary obeyed God even knowing that she would not be excluded from the pain of the sword and the pain that she must have felt knowing as he grew up, she would have to hand him over to the world. The world that would place him high in the sight of their community. They placed Him high but not on a pedestal, they placed Him up high on a cross to be crucified.

God gave Mary a huge responsibility to bring His Son into the world, to nourish and to care for that son. God also gave us as a church a huge responsibility to ensure that we operate and function in the way that God would have us function. And last year we were speaking about a 'Methodist Way of Life' and I want us to be reminded of that. As any parent knows the guidance that we give to our children, and we are all children of God, we as Methodists are a part of the

Salford Methodist Circuit



larger Methodist Church and we split into individual churches and we too need to look at our Mother church, the Methodist Church and it gives us ways and guidance to the Methodist Way of Life, and I want to remind you of these things today.

The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission.

As far as we are able, with God's help:

Worship

We are encouraged to **pray** daily.

We are encouraged to **worship** with others regularly.

We are encouraged to **look and listen for God** in Scripture, and the world.

Learning and Caring

We are encouraged to **care for ourselves** and also for **those around us**.

We are encouraged to **learn more** about our faith.

We are encouraged to **practise** hospitality and generosity.

Service

We are encouraged to **help people** in our communities and beyond.

We are encouraged to **care for God's creation** and all God's gifts.

We are encouraged to **challenge** injustice, and Clare mentioned a little bit about that last week.

Evangelism

We are encouraged to **speak** of the **love of God**.

We are encouraged to **live** in a way that **draws others to Jesus**.

And we are encouraged to **share** our **faith** with others.

And then it has a little blessing at the end of this information and it encourages us to:

be a blessing within and beyond God's Church, for the transformation of the world.

When God created the world. It was lifeless, it was shapeless. God made it into the most wonderful world that we could ever hope for or wish for. When Mary gave birth to Jesus, she knew that it was going to be a hard task to follow. But she did it with love and with nourishment, standing back when she knew she had to.

Our churches today need to listen to what God is saying to us so that we too can do God's work in this world that he created, in this world that he brought Jesus into and in this world that he gave birth to the church of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Salford Methodist Circuit



God created the world to love and to care for. We did go wrong along the way. But He gave us that second chance and he sent his son to be born of Mary and he remained with Mary the whole of her life. And God has been with each one of us, as each church from the mother church was created, was given birth to in our world.

Before our prayers of Intercession which I'm taking from the Companion to the Revised Common Lectionary volume one, Intercession, I'd like us to sing again Here as we kneel.

Hymn: Here as we kneel

*Here as we kneel, here as we pray,
here as we plead, so many words to say,
so you are here, never to leave,
pouring peace into the hollows of our hearts.
And you give the strength for coping, just for today,
and you grant us peace in going in your way,
and your power flows in where faith is faltering,
never weakening, never altering,
Lord, we believe that your grace is sufficient for today,
for today.*

Let us pray to our God who is in the world today and knows our every need. Let us pray:

Merciful God,
The consequences of our human sin and folly
Are terrible to contemplate,
But we bring them in prayer to you,
Seeking salvation for the world, for humankind,
And for ourselves.

We pray for our world,
A world that is devastated and destroyed by greed and lack of foresight:
Earth rendered barren;
Waters made toxic;
Species wiped out.

Creator God, we pray for your world.
In your mercy: **save us.**

We pray for humankind,
For men, women and children
Who have been dehumanized and divided by selfishness and ignorance:
Children weak with hunger;
Women exploited and downtrodden;

Salford Methodist Circuit



Men misshapen by war.

Saviour God, we pray for humankind.

In your mercy: **save us.**

We pray for ourselves,

Damaged and distorted by lack of love or understanding:

Slow to trust in you;

Weakened by guilt;

Afraid to love wholeheartedly.

Spirit of God, we pray for ourselves.

In your mercy: **save us.**

In the name of Christ, your gift of love and salvation to all people in the world,
and the world itself. **Amen.**

Each of us has a task to do in our own ways. We will do that task with the help
of God.

God sends each and everyone of us out into our communities to do His work.
Part of that work is to love one another. So as we journey through Lent
together, we continue together in the love of Christ, sharing that love with each
other and those who we meet along the way. We're going to sing our final hymn,
which is 'Sent by the Lord am I', And I pray that God blesses each one of you
today and always. Amen.

Hymn: Sent By the Lord am I

*Sent by the Lord am I;
my hands are ready now
to make the earth the place
in which the kingdom comes.*

*Sent by the Lord am I;
my hands are ready now
to make the earth the place
in which the kingdom comes.*

*The angels cannot change
a world of hurt and pain
into a world of love,
of justice and of peace.
The task is mine to do,
to set it really free.
Oh, help me to obey;
help me to do your will.*

Salford **Methodist** Circuit



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O God You Search Me - Bernadette Farrell

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