



The Truth About Mothers

By Karen Stallard, Union Chapel Minister

Readings: 1 Samuel chapter 1; Luke 1, 36-59

My Mum taught me many things, how to hang my washing, how to cook my food, but the best thing she taught me was that she was not perfect.

Dear God

Let me let my mother say she's sorry

Forgive me for thinking mothers should be perfect Goddesses.

The truth is...

The perfect mother does not exist

Mothers can never meet all our needs

Mothers can only give what they have been given

Mothers can be frightening sometimes

Mothers get frightened sometimes too

Mothers will struggle to let us go

Mothers will abandon us so we are left alone

Mothers will try to control us

Mothers often don't feel safe enough to make us feel safe

Mothers will criticise as they have been critiqued

Mothers will ignore as they have been ignored

Mothers will rage

Mothers will hurt as they have been hurt

Mothers sometimes cannot see us through their own pain

The perfect mother does not exist

so let us not expect perfection

let us set our mothers free

and stop looking for that which doesn't exist

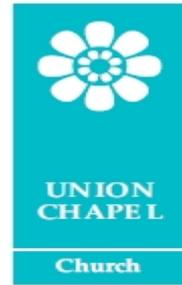
May our mothers forgive us for blaming them for our own imperfections

May mothers and women everywhere know the truth that the perfect mother doesn't exist

and be set free from the guilt of failure.

May women be set free from the idolisation and fantasy goddess role which we have placed upon them.

Let us make our mothers real today but talking about them and to them honestly, respectfully and knowing that they are human just like we are.



Mothersing Sunday (Responsive Prayer)

By Andrew Gardner, UC Heritage and Outreach Worker

Gracious God

We pray for mothers everywhere,
With thanks for their devotion and care.
We pray for those who are expectant,
And unsure of their abilities.

May Your Spirit be with them.

We pray for aunts and grandmothers,
Who so often assist in childcare
While mother is working to put food on the
table.

Bless them for their kindnesses.

May Your Spirit be with them.

We pray for sisters and cousins,
Who are there when mother can't be,
Who look after playground upsets,
And keep their youngers from being alone.

May Your Spirit be with them.

We pray for children
Abandoned, or abused, or neglected,
For whom hope may seem remote,
For whom help is an unknown dream.

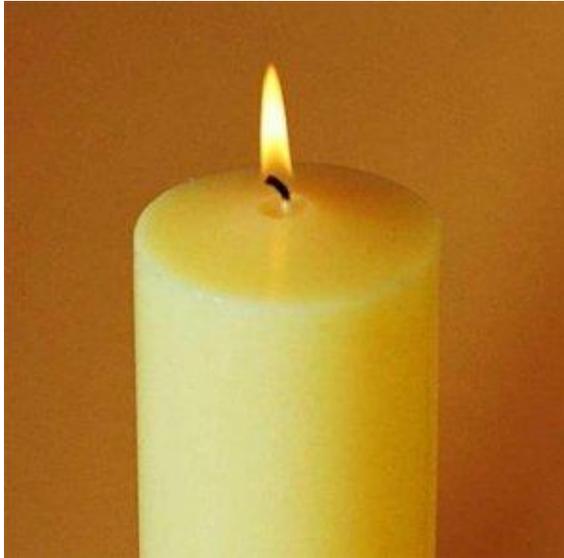
May Your Spirit be with them.

We pray for adoptive, and foster mothers,
Who take in children not their own,
And bring them in to a family home.
Bless the love they give to those in need.

May Your Spirit be with them.

We give thanks for our own mothers,
Who nurtured and nursed,





Who educated and encouraged us,
Whatever our abilities.
May Your Spirit be with them.

We pray for mothers who have left us now,
Or are in the process of departing.
Peace be upon them,
Love be with them.
May Your Spirit be with them.

Gracious God,
May Your sustaining Spirit
Be with us all, always,
And provide nurture and peace.

AMEN

God and Motherhood

By Graham White, Union Chapel Deacon

1 The Hidden Mother in God

1 Samuel 1

We make of mother's day an occasion for reassurance: we use it to support images of motherhood which are, to put it mildly, a little stereotyped. But the reality is always more complex than that: we know, of course, from our own lives, but we can also see this in the stories of motherhood in the Bible. One of the results of these stereotypes is that mothers seem not to be real people: motherhood is, as it were, timeless, it is a state which people are in, and mothers are (in their perfection) all the same. And mothers have, in consequence, no stories. But here are stories.

Hannah was childless, and, in an era when having children was important, deeply ashamed, and it seems rather disturbed, about it. So she prayed in the temple in such a way that she was taken to be drunk. And, after a confrontation with the priest, she promised to dedicate her child to God: and so it came to pass. Samuel, her child, was given to God, and went to live in the temple, at the earliest possible opportunity. She visited him once a year after that.

This is not a normal mother-child relationship. We know very little about Hannah's, or Samuel's, emotional life, but it cannot have been easy for either of them. This story, whatever its origins might be, is at least not stereotyped. There are a lot of mother-child relationships which are like this: there are family relationships in



places which are disrupted by war, there are mothers who collapse under the burden, there are children who, despite the best efforts of the mothers, never respond. And always relationships in which, despite all the odds, something good comes out of it.

If we are to think of God as like a mother – and, despite all of the male imagery, there are images of God as a mother in the bible – then rather than try to picture God by herself in her maternal splendour, it might be a good start to ask about our relationship. If God is *our* mother, then what sort of relationship do we have with her? Good? bad? sentimental? distant? All of these are possibilities with our mothers (as we well know) and all of these are also possibilities with God. And, like with our mothers, a great deal of the difficulty with having a relationship with them – with enjoying it, with finding it sustaining and healing – a great deal of that difficulty lies in the expectations that we, on both sides, have. And in some of these cases there are grotesque bargains, which it is very difficult for us to extricate ourselves from: just think of what Hannah did.

If we are to think of the hidden mother in God, then we ought also to think of what hides God from us. Sometimes it is just plain hiddenness: sometimes we are looking for something that is perfectly visible, but which we cannot see, due to some grotesque bargain or other. Happens all the time. And, in case we forget: being in a grotesque bargain is not something that is unusual, but that is simply the state we are in; and that part of what we refer to as the Gospel is that God should be the one that gets us out of these bargains, rather than putting us into them.

2 Children and Mothers: Hearing Us and Healing Us

Luke 1:39–56

How does the story of Mary and Jesus play out? Concretely? Here, in Luke's gospel, Mary, while pregnant, does what might come naturally to an expectant mother: she goes to see her also pregnant relative. And they spend the time telling stories about how splendid it is all going to be.

There is, of course, another story, a more explicitly religious story, here. And we let this other story take over. But try, just for a moment, to be more concrete, to think of what was going on: the cares and discomforts of pregnancy, the planning, thinking about the future either with worry or with hope, the comparison between one pregnancy and another. And the child in the womb moving: what does it mean? So this story is interwoven with another, hidden story, of everyday care and apprehension.

And, also, there is a back story here; the story of God and Israel. A story about God caring for Israel as a mother cares for her child, a story about God anxiously watching and hoping as the history of Israel unfolds. And this back story is what



prompts Mary to break into song, to say that the story was reaching its triumphant conclusion.

Mary's visit to Elizabeth is about discernment. We have the everyday story and the God-and-Israel story: very well, then, Mary and Elizabeth saw one within the other. Discernment is something that mothers do (sometimes well, sometimes badly): recognising whether their children are happy or unhappy before they can speak, recognising words in the sounds that they make, recognising their personality and their aspirations. Here, by extension, Mary is doing the same for Jesus: and we should not let the theological outlines of this story blind us to the discernment, and the care, that was also taking place.

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A Prayer to all mothers and the motherless, people with children and without

By a church adherent

Let us embrace today all mothers, the motherless, people with children and without
Bodies of innocence and bearers of hope
Jesus, we thank you today for the beauty of our children
Lord God, let us rejoice in the wonderment and excitement of undefended hearts
Holy Spirit, bring your joy and celebration

Amen

Nights of terror and nights that do not cease
Jesus, we embrace today children, adults and mothers who are suffering
Lord God, let us pray and give ourselves in the spirit of your grace to bring comfort
Holy Spirit, bring your healing and anointment

Amen

Sounds of laughing and tickling some more
Jesus, we celebrate joy today, you are our giver of life and wonderful, eternal parent
Lord God, let us worship the majesty of life as little children held in your arms
Holy Spirit, bring your fun and silliness today

Amen



Heart beats crashing and listless weeks
Jesus, we are here today with babes who never began, mothers and children ceased
Lord God, let us listen to cries of pain we may never know nor understand
Holy Spirit, bring your mercy and grace today

Let us rejoice, embrace, worship and listen today
Let us stand with all mothers, the motherless, people with children and without
Let us celebrate today the wonders of childhood, the beauty of dreams, life and the
presence of hope, not in the shape of the perfect Madonna and Christ child but in the
true imperfect shape of our loving and grieving hearts
Let us look beyond our families, our circumstances and give this time of prayer
today:

Lord God, we give you this time for grace to enter in this moment of quiet
For truth and compassion to dwell in our hearts and the hearts of people who are
without loving parents, families or carers to guide them
Babies, children, young people and adults who suffer still

Mother God, we ask you today to bring all who are in pain and suffering to find a
space and a place in the womb of your loving and Almighty being and be loved

Mother God, we call on you today as the divine Mother to all who feel unloved to
gathering all of Her children and providing comfort, rest and nourishment

Father God, Mother God, we rejoice today in your wondrous parenting of all

Thank you for your pure and unconditional, perfect love that embraces all equally
Giving guidance, encouragement and wisdom at all times to our minds, souls and
bodies as we travel through life within your care towards our eternal home

To all mothers and the motherless, people with children and without,
God, our loving parent, we give you our hearts for all today

Amen