

Mothering Sunday Sermon 2026 for St James, Shirley

Psalm 127:1-4, Colossians 3: 12-17, John 19: 25b-27

Our three short Bible readings today teach us that through the Bible – God’s holy word – God has much to teach us about parenting.

Many of you sitting here are parents, others are children. Family life can be one of life’s greatest privileges and most amazing adventures. And a commitment to the Bible’s teachings and principles can inform family life.

Our first reading from **Psalm 127:1-4** reminds us that children are a reward from God – a gift of appreciation, of pleasure, of joy. Children first belong to God.

Wise parents, step-parents, godparents, grandparents and foster parents are meant to take pleasure in the children in their care. Children have the potential to bring joy into our lives. A world without children would be a dull world. Their zest, their laughter, their excitement, their unique way of viewing things adds fullness to the life of parents.

Every child is unique, uniquely formed by God.

In our second reading today, from **Colossians (3:12-17)** we are reminded to clothe ourselves in love, demonstrated through compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience; bearing with one another in forgiveness and love. And instructed to let peace rule in our hearts. Good advice for home and family life.

And Jesus himself demonstrated skills akin to being a good parent in the many ways in which he provided for his disciples and followers. For example, there are many shared mealtimes in the Bible, with sharing communion being the pinnacle of remembering God’s presence among

and between us. In communion we find Jesus present with us across time and space. We are fed by the bread of himself and reconciled to God through the wine of his blood. With Communion, we remember and repeat the meal that Jesus shared the night before he died.

Jesus once said that people only needed to do two things: to love God and to love each other. Networks of love are holy, they keep us fed, nourishing our hearts and giving us hope for tomorrow. When we share in communion, we become the body of Jesus together in our own time and place and can be signs of God's family to the wider world.

Mothering Sunday has been reimagined many times over the years from the days when servant girls in large stately homes were permitted one Sunday a year to walk back to their mother church and see their families. Mothering too has been reimagined.

If you were to have heard a Mothering Sunday sermon any time from the 1850s to the 1950s you would have heard an ode to an ideal of mothering: a woman who is always at home waiting for her loved ones to need her, always gentle and thoughtful, distant from her own drives and passions in order to be the ultimate source of safety and nurture. The angel of the house. The imagination of what a mother was – what the ideal of womanhood was – was narrow.

In the 1970s, pioneer women stayed in their professions even after having children and so began to expand the imagination of what was possible in terms of female vocation. By the 1980s and 90s this had become the norm and even for those who chose to stay at home, very few mothers felt being a mother was their ONLY vocation.

We lost a few stereotypes as the presence of more female journalists and media heads meant that more stories from women about their experience were told. Women spoke about miscarriage and the pain of longing to have a child when biologically this wasn't happening. Society heard different stories of women with their varying passions and gifts who approached mothering in very different ways. And from women who did not want to be mothers.

Fathers became routinely involved with bringing up children and popular images of masculine men feeding a baby or rocking one to sleep expanded the possibilities for women further.

And in all of these ways, you would have thought we would have ended up with a broader definition of motherhood. However what we found was just a new series of ideals that often contradicted each other.

Mothers were expected to be at home but also aspirational, educated career woman. Women were expected to be glamorous with perfect bodies at the same time as getting little more than a few hours sleep with a crying baby.

What we found were contradictory expectations to the point of impossibility for real women. Mothers, often felt guilty that they weren't good enough.

However Mothering Sunday sermons did become more nuanced, recognising that the cliché doesn't work for every woman. Including concern for those for whom Mothering Sunday is the worst day of the year, the only Sunday they choose to miss church because they just do not fit the mould.

In 1994, we ordained our first woman priests and the possibility emerged that the priest, the person preaching the Mother's Day sermon itself could be a real live mother.

So what can we say in church on Mothering Sunday now?

The thing we do know about all of us gathered here, whether we are in this building or joining from our homes is that we are gathered around Jesus. So what does Jesus have to say to all of us about mothering? Let's look at our gospel reading.

The first thing we see is that Jesus notices his mother. Even in the most painful, most challenging moment of his life, he notices her. With almost his last breath, he manages to say what he wants to say, the things that are too important to leave unsaid before he dies.

Surely the context is every mother's worst nightmare. Standing helpless to intervene as your firstborn is dying. But Mary has refused to leave him and Jesus refuses to leave her.

Jesus is present to her. He sees her, he acknowledges her, he listens. This doesn't take the pain all away but the sharing of pain makes it more bearable. Even in his moment of deepest agony Jesus reaches out to stay connected to Mary. You could even say Jesus is maternal towards her. Jesus in his most abandoned is also most maternal as he gathers her up like a hen gathers her chicks.

And what Jesus does, starts something fundamentally new.

Motherhood is always a miracle of newness. No parent can deliver all the components to make another human life. One of the common

experiences when a new born baby is placed in the arms of it's parents, is that of wonder and awe and gratitude. This is something we couldn't have made on our own. And that feeling is right. Every child is a gift from God. Every child has needed the spark of God to make the cells and DNA of two people become a new human being with their own thoughts and ways of engaging with the world.

But now Jesus is doing a new miracle. Mary finds that Jesus is with her and then she finds that there are others with her too. A seemingly random collection of friends and family. Jesus turns to her and says "*Woman here is your son*" pointing not to himself but to John, the disciple. And he turns to John and says, "*Behold your mother.*"

And so whilst most of the disciples had scattered, Jesus, like a mother hen, gathers those he loves together, under his wings.

This is more than a kind provision for his broken-hearted mother and friend. Jesus here is starting something that reimagines what mothering and family is all about.

In Jesus' vision, family is not merely about biology. Our understanding about blood relations becomes something different. Now Mary and John are joined in a covenanted, committed relationship through Jesus.

If you are feeling a lack of connection to your own mother or your children today, Jesus is reaching out to you. If Jesus reached out to Mary from the cross, how much more is he reaching out to you, who are now his family too, today as he sits in glory.

Come to Christ, the mother who gathers and who creates new life. And try and become aware of who Jesus might be inviting you to become

family to? Is it a mother on your street? Could there be a child near you who you could reach out to with the love of Jesus?

Most fundamentally, Jesus calls us, mothers, all of us, to reimagine with him what motherhood, what family could be. To switch our imaginations on to the possibilities that the women and people of all genders, in our lives might be more than we thought they are... and to hold that same wonder as we encounter them as we do when we hold a new-born in our arms that each person is a unique and mysterious gift from God. But then to imagine with Jesus a wider concept of family, an inclusive family that has a place for all. And we are recognised in this family not by birth but by baptism.

Happy Mothering Sunday, Blessed are you Mothers, you women, you people. Blessed are you. Not for our own ideas of who you are but for God's invitation to be seen by Jesus, to be gathered by Jesus to discover others who will be family with you, and to be held with the same wonder with which we hold a brand-new baby.

A prayer to close:

God of compassion, whose Son Jesus Christ, the child of Mary, shared the life of a home in Nazareth, and on the cross drew the whole human family to himself: strengthen us in our daily living that in joy and in sorrow, we may know the power of your presence to bind us together; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. **Amen**