

Open Table Worship – Leader’s Sheets Mothering Sunday Service

A service interwoven with story and verse
inspired by scripture & conversation

Theme: Mothering Sunday: an excuse to talk about God

Written & compiled by Ana Gobledale

Set up:

- Centre piece on each table: everyone might be invited to bring a photo of someone who has been like a mother (in the most positive sense of the term) to them, providing nurture, love and care.
- Place a copy of a reading, or a Bible marked at the reading, or printed handouts, in the centre of each table.
- Bible translations: suggested are *The Inclusive Bible: the first Egalitarian Translation* 2007 by Priests for Equality; *New Revised Standard Version*; or *The Message*. Ideally, have all three available. NRSV provides the scholarly translation and TM provides an interpretation in modern vernacular. *The Inclusive Bible* provides a ready-to-read inclusive language translation.
- Candles to light (one lit candle to use for lighting others)
- Communion elements: juice – or grapes - and bread to be shared (gluten free and non-alcoholic, so no one is excluded). These might be set out before the service on each table, or set aside to be brought forward later in the service.

Coffee & Chat

Look at the items in the centre of your table.

Questions for discussion around the tables:

- When you hear the word ‘mothering’ of whom do you think? Why?
- Who has been nurturing and caring for you in your life? Explain.
- To whom do you offer nurture and care, like a mother? In what ways?

Gathering –

Purpose: to establish as a group; to each fully arrive, moving from the outside world to being fully present here; to get to know names; to affirm one another as God’s creation.

All: We are here. We are who we are.

Introduce yourself using only your first name, then saying either ‘I am

here.’ or ‘I am who I am,’ or both.

Alternatively: Introduce yourself using your first name. Then say, ‘I am here.’ Then everyone responds with the affirmation, ‘You are who you are, created by God, our loving Mother and Father.’

Sharing a greeting of peace

Whoever we are and wherever we are on life’s journey, we are welcome here. I invite you to turn to those near you, greeting one another saying, ‘Peace’ or ‘Shalom’ or ‘Salaam,’ whichever you are comfortable with.

Hearing the Word *Psalm 107:21-22*

Give thanks to God for God’s steadfast love,
for God’s wonderful works to humankind.
Tell of God’s deeds with songs of joy.

Sing *a familiar song/hymn on the theme*

Let us build a house where love can dwell
God of Eve and God of Mary (Fred Kaan, 1989)- 42 Sing Praise
God is Love tune: Blaenwern; 95 in *Rejoice & Sing*
There’s a spirit in the air (Try replacing ‘God in Christ’ with ‘Mother God’ in verses 2,4,6.); 329 in *Rejoice & Sing*
Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father/Mother (Try replacing ‘Father’ with ‘Mother’ in verse 1)

Looking into the Bible *inspired by Genesis 1*

This can be read as a Litany with the congregation responding to a single reader, or the reading might be divided between 2 or more readers with the congregation listening.

Mother’s Day Responsive Reading -- Jann Aldredge-Clanton, USA*

On Worship Words: <http://worshipwords.co.uk/mothering-sunday/>

Leader: In the beginning our Divine Mother gave birth to the universe.

All: She gave birth to light. And She said, “That’s good!”

Leader: God gave birth to the earth, and She saw that it was good.

All: She gave birth to the grass and trees and plants of all kinds and said, “That’s good!”

Leader: Our Mother gave birth to all the fish, both large and small, that swim in the oceans and to all the winged birds that fly above the earth. And She said, “They are good!”

All: God gave birth to the cattle and to all kinds of animals, and She saw how good they are.

Leader: Then our Divine Mother gave birth to female and male human beings. And She blessed female and male human beings with responsibility for the earth and all the other living beings that She had birthed.

All: We come to celebrate all these gifts from our Divine Mother.

Leader: We come to learn again what it means to be entrusted with these gifts.

All: We join together with our Mother and with one another in giving birth to beauty, peace, and kindness. We join Her and one another in nurturing the earth and all living beings.

Leader: Our Mother gives us all power to give birth and to nurture life.

All: God, our Mother, you continually give life to us. Nourish us and teach us to become all you created us to be in your divine image. Help us to receive your power and love so that others may draw life from us. May we join you in giving birth to new life and in nurturing creation. So be it!

*Jann Aldridge-Clanton’s passion is gender inclusivity in the realms of worship, religion and faith expression. Her [website](http://www.jannalredgeclanton.com) includes an annotated list of others concerned with the importance of inclusive language in liturgy, prayer and church life. She is active in the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America. www.jannalredgeclanton.com

Mothering Sunday prayers of approach — Cara Heafey, UK

<http://worshipwords.co.uk/mothering-sunday-prayers-of-approach-cara-heafey-uk/>

For Mothering Sunday, inspired by Julian of Norwich

Mothering God, you birthed the universe into being.
Home-maker, your creation is habitat and sustenance to all that lives.
How costly for you our freedom must be.
How painful the separation
From the parent who has numbered the hairs on our head
And written our names on her heart.

Mothering Jesus, you shed your blood to give us life.
Of your own flesh, you fed us, saying “this is my body, broken for you.”

You taught us with authority and endless patience, how to live and how to love.

You beheld your lost and wandering children

And longed to gather us in

As a hen sheltering her brood beneath her wings.

Mothering Spirit, you dance and weave in the spaces between us.

We hear you in the echoes of the stories our mothers told us

And in the songs their voices sang.

You pull the threads that connect us to one another

And to those who have gone ahead of us.

Yours is the deep wisdom beyond words, the love that calls us home.

Conversations

Mother God? Father God? To whom do we pray? From whom do we receive love, wisdom, guidance and strength? There is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ way to describe God; the Bible uses both traditionally masculine and feminine attributes to describe God.

- When God is described as ‘Mother,’ how do you feel?
- What words or names do you feel most comfortable using when you talk to God? or when you describe God?
- How do you relate to God as your creator? Mother? Guide in life?

Looking in the Bible: *A Mothering Sunday Litany: Women in the Bible*

Rather than reading directly from the Bible, we will be hearing from several women whose stories reside in the Bible.

A Mother's Day Litany

(original source unknown)

Overview:

16 flowers—a variety of colours-- are distributed to readers who represent the Biblical women mentioned in the litany, and are gathered into one colourful bouquet.

Directions:

- Print up the litany and cut each reader's section as a strip. Distribute.
- Each reader receives and holds a flower.
- During the litany, each reader reads the line spoken by the person they represent.
- The gathered congregation responds with the sentence relating to women today (written in *bold italics*).
- Following each section, the person holding the flower places their flower in the vase., adding to the colourful bouquet.

Leader:

How many of you have a mother? I hope you all raised your hand! A common experience for us all – having a mother. Some of us may have never known our mother, or been estranged from our mothers. For others, our lives are closely entwined with loving, and very present, mothers.

Today on Mothering Sunday, we focus not only on biological mothers, but on all the people who have been like-mothers to us. Women and men, fathers and aunts and grandparents. And those not related by blood.

The Bible introduces us to numerous mothers – good mothers, and not-so-good mothers, loving mothers and harsh mothers, wise mothers and foolish mothers, happy mothers and suffering mothers. There is no one mold for mothers, as we all can attest to, I'm sure.

In this litany, we hear the voices of several Biblical mothers. Although these women lived long ago, they experienced the same joy and pain that mothers of today experience. As we listen to their stories, let us remember the important mother-figures in our lives, those who have seen, not just with their eyes, but with their heart.

- 1. Eve:** I am Eve. My son Cain killed his brother Abel because he was jealous.
We remember mothers whose families are torn apart by jealousy, fighting and misunderstandings.
- 2. Sarah:** I am Sarah. I was an old woman when I gave birth to my son Isaac.
We remember mothers who are older, but who still bear the responsibility of raising children and grandchildren.
- 3. Rebekah:** I am Rebekah. I helped my favourite son Jacob to trick his brother Esau out of his birthright.
We remember mothers who mean well, but make mistakes.
- 4. Moses' mother:** I am Moses' mother. I hid my child so that he would not be taken by the government authorities.
We remember mothers whose children are taken or stolen from them because of commercial interests or government policy.
- 5. An Egyptian Princess:** I am Pharaoh's daughter. I found a baby in a basket and adopted him, raising him as my own child.
We remember mothers who have adopted children and mothers who have had their children adopted.
- 6. Hannah:** I am Hannah, the mother of Samuel. I was one of many women who had difficulty becoming a mother.
We remember mothers who, after many disappointments, are finally successful in being able to conceive and give birth to a child.
- 7. Mother of David:** I am the mother of David. I watched as my son grew from being a shepherd boy to become a great king.
We remember mothers who rejoice in the achievements of their children.
- 8. Widow of Zarephath:** I am the widow of Zarephath. When my bowl of flour and oil is gone, my child and I will die because our land is gripped by famine.
We remember mothers who watch their children suffer and die from malnutrition because of famine, drought, flood or war.

- 9. Mother of Bethlehem:** I am one of the mothers from Bethlehem. King Herod's soldiers murdered our children for no reason.
We remember mothers whose children are tortured and murdered by soldiers and militia for political reasons.
- 10. Mother of Salem:** I am a mother of Salem. I wanted to take my children to meet Jesus, but his disciples said not to bother him.
We remember mothers who would like their children to know Jesus but are discouraged by modern day disciples who don't like annoying kids.
- 11. Syrophenician woman:** I am the Syrophenician woman. Even though Jesus referred to me as a dog, I pestered him to cure my daughter who was very ill.
We remember mothers whose children are sick or disabled and who will try anything to cure or help them.
- 12. Widow at Nain:** I am the widow at Nain. Jesus raised my son from the dead so I would not be left destitute.
We remember mothers who, as widows, or for other reasons, raise their children alone.
- 13. Mother of James and John:** I am the mother of James and John. I asked Jesus if they could have a special place next to him in Heaven.
We remember mothers who believe their children can do no wrong and deserve special treatment.
- 14. Mary:** I am Mary. I watched my child suffer and die on a cross.
We remember mothers who watch their children suffer and die.
- 15. A barren woman:** I am one of many nameless women. I was not able to be a mother, even though I would have liked it very much.
We remember women who, because of various circumstances, are unable to become mothers.
- 16. Lois:** I am Lois. Eunice and I taught Timothy, our son and grandson about Jesus.
We remember mothers who teach their children about Jesus.

Leader: We remember the important mother-figures of long ago and in our own lives, those who have seen, not just with their eyes, but with their heart.

Conversations: going deeper *optional, if time allows*

Consider these questions about:

- With which of these Biblical figures do you identify?
- What are your experiences of 'mothering', of nurturing and caring for others?
- When has God, like a mother, intervened in your life to offer the nurture and care you have needed?
- To whom, might God be calling you to reach out with a nurturing and caring spirit?

Sharing & Caring – Bringing light into our world

As we meditate upon mothers and those who have mothered and cared for us and for others, if you would like to light a candle, please do so at this time.

You might light a candle to celebrate someone who has been like a mother, in the positive sense, to you, or as a symbol of forgiveness to someone who did not handle the task of mothering and caring well. You might light the candle for yourself, asking God to strengthen and guide you as a mothering and caring figure, or to remember someone who is in need of receiving love and care.

If you would like to share for whom you are lighting a candle, feel free to say the name aloud, or you may light a candle in silence.

A Prayer for Mothers

(after everyone has had the opportunity to light a candle.)

Pray with me.

Mother Father God, creator and carer, we thank you for nurturing and protecting us like a mother. On this Sunday, especially, we thank you for mothers, and for all people, women and men, who nurture and care for others. We thank you for those who have mothered us, in the best sense of the word, those who have seen the best in us, seen us with their heart. We pray, too, for those who have been challenged as mothers and by mothers. Hold them closely in your love. Show us all how to see not only with our eyes, but with our hearts. Amen.

A song to lead into communion

a familiar reflective song/hymn on the theme of communion

Time for quiet reflection

Lord's Prayer

Join me in the Lord's Prayer (using an alternative version written by _____).

Use a familiar version (which many people will know from memory) or introduce an alternative version. Mothering Sunday offers a unique opportunity to employ feminine and inclusive images for God.

Alternative versions: all can be found at <http://worshipwords.co.uk/lords-prayer/>

- **A version of the Lord's Prayer** by Stephen Best, UK
Great Love; the root and sap of our evolving fullness...
- **The Lord's Prayer — interpreted** by Sam Alexander, UK
Those things that are good and right and true:
I acknowledge them with honour and love...
- Disciples Prayer by Thandiwe Dale-Ferguson, USA
Holy One whose name we honour and praise,
When we laugh, you laugh with us.
When we weep, your tears wash over the earth...
...By your creativity, the universe was born,
And in your love, we are sustained. Amen.
- The Abba Prayer by Rex AE Hunt, USA
- Earth Maker, a modern version from New Zealand

Invitation to Communion:

The table is set for our special meal. The bread, the juice, prepared and presented. Ready to be served and shared.

We remember Jesus sharing a meal like this with his disciples, his friends. Like a mother opening her home to her children's friends, he included and welcomed everyone, those he could trust and those he could not trust. Today we are those disciples, those friends. Each one of us is welcome. How amazing it is to be loved and wanted even when we have not been perfect. How wonderful it is to be included as we are.

The bread is gluten free and the juice is non-alcoholic so that all may partake freely. No one is excluded from this meal.

Prayer of preparation

As we approach this meal of mystery in the hope and promise of reconciliation, we prepare ourselves in prayer. Pray with me.

Mother God, authentic love and patience, thank you for claiming us and embracing us as your own children, for loving us with your ever-forgiving love. Help us experience your maternal embrace and hear your call afresh. Shine your light in our midst, that we might move forward in confidence ever closer to the path you have set before us.

Empower us to respond to your call to care for all your children, near and far. Help us be good family, true brothers and sisters, in the best sense of that word, to one another and to others. May we see the good in everyone and share love as freely as you have given love to us.

You are our example. Help us to follow in your steps. May this shared meal, the feast of love for the family of God, renew us and strengthen us to live in gratitude and joy. May it be so.

Words of Assurance (optional)

Our Divine Mother, the force of all creation, watches over us all, rejoicing when we are found and restored to wholeness, generously forgiving a repentant heart. Receive God's caring embrace.

Words of Remembrance: the communion story

When Jesus shared the bread with his friends, he explained that he is the Bread of Life. As bread nourishes and strengthens our bodies, Jesus nourishes and strengthens our spirits and minds. When we eat the bread together, we are strengthened as a community to remember Jesus and to do the things Jesus would do in our world, to work for justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

Jesus also shared a cup of the fruit of grapes. Through this cup, we are nourished as a child is nourished at a mother's breast, with the very pulse of life. Drinking the juice together helps us remember our responsibility to this suffering world, to be agents of healing where there is brokenness, of hope where there is despair.

God loves us so much that when we make mistakes, or when we make bad choices, God has agreed to forgive us and grants us a second chance, every time. This meal is a sign of that covenant.

This is ordinary bread and ordinary juice. But when we eat the bread together and drink the juice together, something extraordinary happens which brings us closer to Jesus and to one another. We become the 'Body of Christ,' which means that our eyes and ears are opened to see and hear what Jesus would see in our world. And our arms and hands are empowered to do Jesus's work to help others.

May this shared meal of mystery and awe manifest for us the very essence of the risen Christ in our midst.

Prayer of Thanks

Mothering and caring God, for this time together around this table, we give thanks. For the power of this meal, this simple bread and juice, to unite us as your children, we give thanks. Amen.

Breaking of the Bread *Break bread as words are spoken:*

Although the bread is broken like Jesus' body, by sharing it, we are renewed and made whole.

Pouring of the cup *Pour our juice as words are spoken:*

Although the cup represents blood spilled, by sharing it, we are both nourished and reconciled with God and one another.

Blessing of the Bread and Juice

Pray with me. Spirit of Love, fill this bread and these cups with your power that we might feel your nourishment. Make us one spiritual body, one family, united with one another and all peoples of all nations. May this meal empower us to care for your world, bringing peace and justice to all, in your name. Amen.

Ministering to you in Christ's name, all things are ready.

Sharing the bread

When you take a piece of bread, please hold it until everyone has a piece. Then we will all eat together. [or: Please eat the bread as you receive it.]

When everyone has bread:

This is the Bread of Life. Eat, in the knowledge that God, like a mother, cares for you.

Sharing the juice

When you take a cup of juice, please hold it until everyone has been served. Then we will all drink together.

When everyone has a cup:

This is the Cup of Forgiveness. Drink, in the knowledge that God, like a perfect mother, forgives and loves you.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Pray with me. Mother Father God, you know each of us, your children, by name. Thank you for your presence in our lives, today and each day. Thank you for renewing and uniting us through this special and mysterious meal. Amen.

Sing *a familiar uplifting song/hymn*
--see suggestions earlier in the service

Closing Prayer

God, your love surrounds us like a mother's love.

We rejoice that we are your own beloved children, nourished by you, guided to see not only with our eyes, but with our hearts. Mothering God, empower us to share the light of your justice with all your children. Make us eager to share your love with all we meet!

Closing act

Have another cuppa?

Shake hands?

Slip away quietly?

Take a flower and a hug to your mother or a mother-figure?

Whatever is comfortable for the group and for the individuals.