

A DIFFERENT MOTHERING SUNDAY

At this time of year we think about mothers. Next Sunday is Mothering Sunday.

With the present Coronavirus epidemic taking hold, some of us worry about those who have mothered us (birth mothers and others). We are anxious that they themselves desperately need of the kind of mothering that we cannot give, because it is safest for them to be isolated. We may lie awake with racing hearts, trying to work out how to supply them with bread, eggs, milk, and that most precious commodity, toilet paper! We may long to live nearer to them so that we have some kind of control over them, and can ensure that they wash their hands for long enough, and don't stand so close to the delivery person that they pick up the virus – can we really trust them to stay 2 metres away when they long for human touch. These parents of ours may even begin to seem like wayward toddlers, over whom we have no control.

It's really hard for many of us to find a way of relaxing back into God's arms, and trusting that not only will God care for us but this also includes our parents, children and those others who we love. God will look after all of us, whether we catch the flu and become seriously or mildly ill.

When Jesus was nearing the end of his life on earth, he stood gazing over the city with exasperation, expressing his frustration in the words, 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.' *Matthew 23.37 NIV*

God longs to shelter you, me those we love just as a mother hen shelters her chicks. How hard it is for some of us to dive under those wings out of our anxiety-laden surroundings.

My grandparents lived on a farm in Leicestershire and reared chickens. Every day I'd help them collect and sort the eggs. I'll never forget one day when Grandma sat me down, and with tears streaming down her face, she told me how years earlier the chicken coup had been caught in a terrible fire and the hens burned to death. But, she also explained that under the wings of many of those hens nestled their living chicks – chicks who'd been protected through the fire.

This is what God longs to do for us. Many of us may be able to find a way of resting back into God's love, or of diving headfirst under God's loving wings and trusting that we will be cared for. Jesus also added, 'But you were not willing...' Some of us choose to go with the flow. If everyone else is panicking, then we will too. We refuse to look in God's direction for the help and steadying that is ours for the taking.

However, don't forget that some of us were born anxious – it's in our genes and make-up and we can't help it. God understands this and doesn't tell us off if we've been born with an anxious streak. We can gently try not to tell ourselves off or feel guilty if we can't manage our anxiety as some others do. And if everything seems more than we can manage to bear, contacting the GP for help might be God's way forward for us – and taking medication so we can manage anxiety might be God's gift to us.

Mothering Sunday this year becomes a day in which we cannot be with those who have mothered us. But we can think of them, phone, use social media to contact them and send many cyber hugs in their direction. In my imagination, I have placed those for whom I care so much, in God's hands and I imagine those strong safe wings protecting them. It's tough not seeing them, we may not really trust them to look after themselves properly, but the love that never ever fails is that of God.

Join me, and together let's do our best to rest back, or dive into that shelter offered to us.

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PRAYERS FOR MOTHERING SUNDAY

God made known^{[L][SEP]} in the strength and vulnerability of birth, the joy and pain of motherhood^{[L][SEP]} in nights of sleepless love^{[L][SEP]} and inner ocean's flow^{[L][SEP]} in demands without number^{[L][SEP]} and questions without answer:^{[L][SEP]} give us gratitude for the women who carried us, for the carers who nurture us^{[L][SEP]} and for the chance to pass on life to others; through Jesus Christ, Mary's Child^{[L][SEP]} Amen.
(Inclusive Church Prayers)

Extravagant God^{[L][SEP]} lavishing your love^{[L][SEP]} on our poverty of heart^{[L][SEP]} inspire us to give without stint^{[L][SEP]} to lose life^{[L][SEP]} that we might find it again, ^{[L][SEP]} so the world

will be filled^[]_{SEP} with the fragrance of your love^[]_{SEP} through Jesus Christ, who offers himself for us. Amen. (*Inclusive Church Prayers*)

Loving God, please help us to trust in you – to trust that you will see us through this difficult, and potentially dangerous time. May those of us who are older, be sensible and not cause unnecessary anxiety to those who love us. For young and older alike, we ask you to calm our anxiety as we care for those who are vulnerable in our families and society. Give us clear thinking as to what it is that we need to do, to provide for ourselves and others, and help us not to selfishly grab more than our fair share of life's necessities. Teach us how to lie back and rest in you, and how to dive under the safety of your wings when we need to. Thank you for loving us so greatly and generously. Amen
(*Anne Townsend*)