

Poole Bay Methodist Circuit Worship
Sunday 15th March 2026
MOTHERING SUNDAY
with Reverend Gill Le Boutillier-Scott

Good morning and welcome to worship.

Today is Mothering Sunday, a day when many people pause to give thanks for mothers and for those who have nurtured and cared for us.

For some people this day is joyful and full of gratitude.

But we also recognise that it can bring many different emotions. Some people are grieving mothers who are no longer here. Some have complicated relationships with their mothers. Some long to be parents but cannot. Some are quietly carrying the heavy work of caring for others.

So today we gather with **all those feelings present**.

The good news of the Christian faith is that God welcomes us exactly as we are — joyful, weary, grateful, grieving, hopeful.

Wherever you find yourself today, you are welcome here.

Let us worship God together.

Call to Worship

We gather today as God's children.

Some full of joy,

some carrying sorrow,

some quietly searching for hope.

God calls us together with compassion.

The God who comforts like a mother.

The God who calls us to live as children of light.

So come—bring your whole self.

Let us worship the God whose love never fails.

Hymn: STF 51 - Great Is Thy Faithfulness

Opening Prayer

Let us pray.

Loving God,

You are the source of all love and care.

You formed us, you know us, and you hold us in your compassion.

Today we give thanks for mothers and for all those who have nurtured us in life and faith.

For people who encouraged us,

who protected us,

who helped us grow into who we are.

But today we also bring before you the harder parts of this day.

Memories that ache.

Relationships that are complicated.

People we miss deeply.

We thank you that your love is big enough to hold every emotion we carry.

As we worship today, draw near to us.

Comfort us, encourage us, and guide us so that we may live as people who reflect your light in the world.

Through Jesus Christ we pray.

Amen.

Hymn: STF 657 - You give rest to the weary

Scripture Readings

Our first reading comes from **Book of Isaiah 66:12–13**.

“For this is what the Lord says:

I will extend peace to her like a river...

As a mother comforts her child,

so will I comfort you;

and you will be comforted.”

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Our second reading comes from ****Epistle to the Ephesians 5:8–14**.

“For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light.

Live as children of light...

Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead,

and Christ will shine on you.”

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Short Reflection

One of the things nurturing people do is **help us see clearly**.

Think about a child learning to walk, read, or ride a bike. Someone encourages them. Someone helps them try again when they fall.

Slowly, step by step, they grow.

That kind of nurturing helps people move from uncertainty into confidence.

In our reading from Ephesians we hear something similar:

“You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.”

God’s love helps us grow into the people we are meant to be.

Sometimes the people who nurture us help us discover that light.

And sometimes God’s love reaches us **through those people**.

Mothering Sunday reminds us how powerful that kind of care can be.

It reminds us that small acts of encouragement and kindness can change lives.

Hymn: STF 59 - Lord the light of your love

Sermon

Mothering Sunday has become associated with flowers, cards, and family meals.

And those things can be lovely. They are ways of expressing gratitude and appreciation.

But the origins of this day are actually a little deeper than that. Traditionally it was the day when people returned to their **“mother church”** during Lent. People who had moved away for work or service would return to the church where they had been baptised or raised in faith.

So underneath the modern traditions is this bigger idea: **nurture**.

Mothering Sunday invites us to think about the people and the communities that have **shaped us, sustained us, and helped us grow**.

Because nurture is one of the ways life flourishes.

Nurture is about creating the conditions where something fragile can become strong, where something small can grow into maturity, where someone unsure of themselves can discover confidence and purpose.

And the Bible tells us that nurture is not just something human beings do. It is something that is rooted deeply in **the character of God**.

In our reading from the Book of Isaiah we hear God say something remarkable:

“As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you.”

That image is striking because it gives us a picture of God that is deeply tender and relational.

Often when people think about God they imagine power, authority, or judgement. Those themes do exist in scripture. But here the prophet uses a different image entirely — the image of **maternal comfort**. It's the picture of a child who is hurt or frightened, and a mother drawing them close, holding them, soothing them.

It is quiet.

It is gentle.

It is attentive.

And God says: *that is what my love for you is like.*

It is worth pausing for a moment to notice something important here.

The Bible uses many different images to describe God. God is described as a shepherd, a king, a father, a rock, a refuge, even as a mother bird gathering her chicks.

Each of those images helps us understand something about who God is.

And here in Isaiah we see something beautiful: **God's compassion is personal and tender.**

The context of Isaiah's words makes that even more powerful.

These words were spoken to people who had experienced deep loss and upheaval. Their city had been destroyed. Their community had been scattered. Their future felt uncertain.

They were living with grief, trauma, and anxiety.

And it is precisely in that moment that God says:

“As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you.”

God meets them not with condemnation, but with **compassion**.

And that matters for us too, because life is rarely as simple as greeting cards make it appear.

Mothering Sunday itself can carry many emotions.

For some people it is a day of deep gratitude.

For others it is a day of grief — remembering mothers who are no longer here.

For some it is complicated — relationships that are strained, memories that are difficult.

For others it is a quiet ache — the longing to be a parent that has not been fulfilled.

And for some it is simply exhausting — because nurturing others, day after day, is beautiful but also demanding work.

So the image in Isaiah is not sentimental. It is not pretending that life is tidy or easy.

Instead it is a promise that **God meets us in our vulnerability**.

God's love is not distant or detached.

God's love draws near.

Sometimes in the most ordinary moments.

There's a story I once heard about a small child who had woken in the night frightened by a storm. Thunder was rolling outside and lightning was flashing through the window.

The child called out for their mother.

Eventually the mother came in and said, “You don't need to be afraid. God is with you.”

The child thought for a moment and replied, “I know God is with me... but right now I need someone with skin on.”

There's something honest about that.

And often that is how God works.

God's comfort often comes **through people**.

Through someone sitting with us in grief.

Through someone listening when we are struggling.

Through someone quietly reminding us that we are not alone.

Those small acts of compassion become the way God's love is experienced in the world.

But the story does not stop with comfort.

Because our second reading from the Epistle to the Ephesians takes the conversation further.

Paul writes:

“Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light.”

That's a powerful statement.

Notice that Paul doesn't say, “You should try to be better people.”

He says something much deeper.

“You were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.”

In other words, the Christian life is not just about behaviour. It is about **identity**.
Because of Christ, something fundamental has changed.
Through grace, through forgiveness, through God's transforming presence, we become people who belong to the light.
In the Bible, light symbolises truth, goodness, and the presence of God.
Darkness symbolises confusion, injustice, and separation.
To live as "children of light" means allowing God's presence to reshape how we live.
Paul says the fruit of light is found in **goodness, righteousness, and truth**.
Those are not abstract theological concepts. They are lived realities.
Goodness means choosing compassion over indifference.
Righteousness means seeking justice and integrity in how we treat others.
Truth means living with honesty and openness rather than hiding behind appearances.
And here is where this connects so beautifully to the theme of nurture.
Because nurturing others is one of the ways we **live as children of light**.
Think about the people who have helped you grow in life.
Often they are not the most powerful or famous people.
They are the ones who noticed you.
The ones who encouraged you when you doubted yourself.
The ones who patiently walked alongside you.
I remember a teacher once telling a group of students something simple but powerful. She said, "You might forget the lessons I teach you, but I hope you never forget that you matter."
That kind of nurture stays with people for years.
Another example comes from gardening.
If you plant a seed and then leave it completely alone, it may struggle to grow. But if someone waters it, protects it from frost, gives it sunlight and care, something remarkable happens.
The life that was hidden inside the seed begins to flourish.
Nurture creates the conditions for growth.
And in many ways that is what the church is meant to be.
A community where people are encouraged in faith.
A place where people are reminded that they are loved by God.
A place where people are helped to grow into the fullness of who God created them to be.
Mothering Sunday reminds us that nurturing is not limited to biological mothers.
Not everyone is called to be a parent.
But all followers of Christ are called to **participate in God's nurturing work**.
Teachers do it.
Carers do it.
Mentors do it.
Friends do it.
Church communities do it.
Every time we encourage someone who feels discouraged...
Every time we show patience when it would be easier to walk away...
Every time we help someone discover their dignity and worth...
We are helping the light of Christ shine in the world.
Near the end of our reading Paul includes what many scholars believe was an early Christian hymn:
"Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."
It's a call to awakening.
A reminder that faith is about stepping out of darkness and into the light of Christ.
And as that light shines on us, it begins to shine **through us**.
So today, on Mothering Sunday, we do two things.
First, we give thanks.
We remember the people who nurtured us — mothers, grandparents, teachers, mentors, friends.
People who helped shape our lives.
And second, we reflect on the invitation God gives us.
To become people who nurture others.

People who bring compassion where there is pain.
People who bring encouragement where there is doubt.
People who help the light of Christ shine a little more brightly in the world.
Because every act of kindness matters.
Every moment of patience matters.
Every small act of nurture helps the light grow stronger.
And that is the life God calls us to live.
Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray.
Loving God,
We thank you for your compassion and care,
for the way you nurture us with patience and love.
We thank you for mothers and for all who nurture others.
For mothers who give their time, their energy, their wisdom, and their love day after day,
strengthen them and encourage them.
For mothers who are exhausted, worried, or overwhelmed,
give them rest and support.
For those who long to be mothers but cannot,
surround them with your comfort and hope.
For those whose relationships with their mothers are difficult or painful,
bring healing and peace.
For those who grieve mothers who have died,
hold them close in your compassion today.
We thank you also for all those who nurture others in different ways:
grandparents, carers, teachers, mentors, neighbours, and friends.
Bless them in the quiet work they do that often goes unnoticed.
We pray for your church throughout the world.
For communities of faith seeking to share the love of Christ in their neighbourhoods.
Help the church to be a place of welcome, encouragement, and grace.
A place where people find healing and belonging.
A place where people are nurtured in faith and helped to grow as disciples of Christ.
We pray for our own church community.
Help us to care for one another well.
Help us to be patient with each other, generous with encouragement, and ready to serve.
Teach us to reflect your love in practical ways.
We pray for our world.
For places where there is conflict and violence.
For people living with fear, displacement, and loss.
We think especially of those caught in wars and tensions across our world today.
Bring wisdom to leaders, courage to peacemakers, and protection to those who are vulnerable.
Where hatred divides people, bring understanding.
Where injustice wounds communities, bring justice and restoration.
Where despair feels overwhelming, bring hope.
And finally we pray for ourselves.
Help us to live as children of light.
When we feel discouraged, remind us of your presence.
When we feel impatient, give us grace.
When we have opportunities to show kindness, give us courage to act.
May the light of Christ shine in our lives,
in our homes,
and in our community.
And so we gather all our prayers together in the words that Jesus taught us.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

Hymn: STF 503 - Love Divine, all Loves Excelling

Blessing

May the God who comforts like a mother
hold you in compassion.
May Christ, the light of the world,
guide your steps.
And may the Holy Spirit
help you live with kindness, courage, and grace.
And the blessing of God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
be with you today and always.
Amen.