



**The Benefice of  
Harden, Wilsden, Cullingworth, Denholme  
Sunday 14 March 2021  
The Fourth Sunday of Lent: Mothering Sunday**

**The Greeting**

We praise you, our God, for all mothers who have loved and laughed and laboured as they cared for their children.

**Blessed be God for ever!**

We praise you, our God, for all mothers who have wept in sorrow and joy for their children.

**Blessed be God for ever!**

We praise you, our God, for Jesus, born of a woman and nurtured in her love, and for Mary, a reminder of your patient, waiting love.

**Blessed be God for ever!**

**Confession**

Let us call to mind our sin, our failure to value the love of others and our failure to love as Christ has loved us.

Your love gives us life from the moment of conception

We fail to live as your children.

Lord have mercy: **Lord have mercy**

You call us to do good. We seek our own good.

Christ have mercy: **Christ have mercy**

You hear us when we cry for help. We ignore the cries of others.

Lord have mercy: **Lord have mercy**

## Absolution

May the Father of all mercies  
Cleanse us from our sins,  
And restore us in his image  
To the praise and glory of his name,  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

## The Collect

God of love,  
Passionate and strong,  
Tender and careful:  
Watch over us and hold us  
All the days of our life;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

## The Readings

### The First Reading: **2 Corinthians 1:3-7**

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering. Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.

**Thanks be to God for the gift of His word**

## The Gospel: **John 3: 14-21**

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

‘Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.’

The is the Gospel of the Lord  
**Praise to you, O Christ**

### **Reflection from Liz Maitland**

Nicodemus, the Jewish teacher had come to visit Jesus when it was dark, and like all the details in John’s Gospel, this fact is there for a reason. Appearing out of the darkness is John’s way of telling us that Nicodemus didn’t yet know or understand God’s love for himself and the world. He was, as we might say, ‘in the dark’. He therefore inhabited a world where things that harm and hurt go unnoticed, unrecognised or are even encouraged, a world where forgiveness hasn’t been sought and received and people, despite their knowledge of the Hebrew Law, do not know the comfort and power of God’s presence. But Nicodemus had come in search of something

different and he certainly found it in this amazing conversation with Jesus!

John's readers would understand 'light' as goodness and a nearness to God. Darkness is the absent of that goodness and represents an ignorance of or even a rejection of God's goodness. Our slightly different thinking might tell us that darkness is beautiful and necessary too, but that isn't where John is coming from. John's Gospel is definitely on the side of the light!

I am sure you are reading this because you want to live in the light of God's love. At some point you have made that choice. I am also sure you have found, as I have, that choosing the light is not a one-off decision we make when we choose to follow Christ, but an every day, every hour and every minute choice. Sometimes it feels hard. Sometimes the light is just too bright and penetrating and we want to turn away.

If you followed last week's lectionary reading, it looked at the account of Jesus clearing out the sellers from the Temple courtyard and we thought about clearing space in our lives for God. It's hard to see what's going on when there's too much stuff in the way. This week invites us to shine God's light into this space.

It would be easy to say that we have stayed away from the darkest of dark places and mainly kept on the right paths. We have tried to love people and do the right thing- of course we have. But in this exacting time of Lent, we are being called to ask ourselves, is this enough? Are we shining brightly with God's light in the world or have the years installed a dimmer switch, so that our brightness is more of a glow than a beam?

Some friends recently shared a short film they had made of some little plants on their window sill that kept growing towards the light, so they kept turning them round so they wouldn't lean and could

grow straight, The time lapsed film shows these little plants growing towards the light again and again.

At our best, we grow towards the light, quite naturally, but the trouble starts when other things get in the way. Life can turn us away towards other priorities which take our time and energy as we pursue them. Before we know it, we have forgotten what it feels like to be in the light. We haven't actively chosen the darkness, but we have ended up there for want of seeking out God's light.

We need to embody the spirit of those little plants that just naturally kept reaching for the light, despite the attempts to turn them away. Perhaps the way towards this is to examine the connection we have with God. Is it a relationship we cherish and prioritise above all else or one we squeeze in when we can? If we spend time with God in prayer and quietness, we become drawn towards the light quite naturally, just as a young child instinctively reaches for the mother she knows so well. As we read God's word, it starts to grow within us and we begin to lean towards a different way of thinking and living. We might not even realise at first, and others may notice the changes in us before we do.

So, let us use these remaining weeks of Lent to make a commitment to spend time with God, with no other design than to be in His presence. This is what God desires. God's is the love that we can reach out for, knowing instinctively it will bring light into whatever darkness we may encounter. With this light in our lives, we will never be without hope, and what's more, others will see something of God's light shining through us- which is an amazing thing!

### Affirmation of Faith

**We believe in God the Father,  
From whom every family  
In heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,  
Who lives in our hearts through faith,  
And fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,  
Who strengthens us from on high.**

**We believe in one God;  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
Amen.**

**Prayers of Intercession led by Michael Richardson**

Lord, on this Mothering Sunday we ask for your blessing on our closest relationships. We give thanks for the love and protection of parents for their children, and in particular for the way mothers care for and nurture their families. We ask for your strength and patience for parents who find bringing up children to be particularly stressful. As children have returned to schools and colleges this week, we pray that they and their teachers will be safe and that any possible spike in virus cases will be slight and short lived. May we also share in the joy that children will feel in once again being amongst their friends. May we also light heartedly share in the joy that many parents and grandparents will feel as home schooling winds down!

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, on this special day too, we give you thanks for the Church, which has been there for us from childhood and throughout our lives. Thank you for the good things in the Church which have nourished us and helped us to grow – the love; the extended family, and the sustenance of the Holy Communion. We thank you for the clergy and all who work tirelessly in our communities, giving of their love, time and energy as living witnesses of the Kingdom of God.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, as the world starts to recover from the pandemic, please help it to re-grow into a more generous and less confrontational and belligerent place. Whilst understandably wanting to protect their own populations first, please help rich countries to be generous in making vaccines available for poorer countries. Fighting and strife have continued during the last twelve months but they do seem to have been at a lesser level than normal – perhaps because we have been fighting a common enemy. When the pandemic has been defeated, help us to cooperate more in tackling other common enemies such as climate change and third world poverty and hunger. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, as we read the road map to normality, let us remember again the people who have brought us to this point. The list is too long to record everybody but we must thank especially doctors, nurses, the whole of the NHS, carers, key workers, scientists and the leaders of our communities, cities and country. We pray that just as buds appear; plants grow, and flowers flourish over the coming months, so jobs and incomes return; confidence grows, and businesses re-open and thrive.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Finally Lord, we remember those who have particularly suffered during the pandemic. We pray for the vulnerable, many of whom have scarcely moved from their houses for a whole year. Similarly the lonely and old who have been devoid of personal contact for long periods; families which have been kept apart by distance or fear of infection, and the sick and the suffering who have been deprived of the sort of medical attention, x-rays, tests and operations that they would receive under normal circumstances.

We remember too – and pray for – those who have died over the past twelve months, many without loved ones being able to be with

them during their final hours, and all those for whom it has not been possible to pay proper respects due to funeral restrictions.  
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

**Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us,  
lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen.**

### Blessing

May God, who gave birth to all creation, bless us:

May God, who became incarnate by an earthly mother, bless us:

May God, who broods as a mother over her children, bless us.

May almighty God bless us, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

Now and for ever. **Amen.**

### Sending Out

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord:

**in the name of Christ. Amen.**

