

URC JOINT SERVICE FOR MOTHERING SUNDAY

14th MARCH 2021

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'Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth
Serve the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.
For the Lord is good and his love endures forever
His faithfulness continues for all generations'.

OPENING PRAYER

Jesus, like a mother you gather your people to you;
you are gentle with us as a mother with her children.

Despair turns to hope through your sweet goodness;
through your gentleness we find comfort in fear.

Your warmth gives life to the dead,
your touch makes sinners righteous.

Lord Jesus, in your mercy heal us;
in your love and tenderness remake us.

In your compassion bring grace and forgiveness,
for the beauty of heaven may your love prepare us. Amen
St Anselm of Canterbury

BIBLE READING: 1 KINGS 3: 16-28

SERMON

When we think about the love from a father or the love from a mother they may come across differently and everyone will also have different experiences from their childhood and relationship with their own parents. At this point in our talk I am sorry if any of you experienced a difficult family life as a child.

My Dad was very caring and if he did 'shout' or 'raise his voice' at me or my brother we knew that we'd done something seriously wrong.

It was quite common when I was a child that a lot of mums, including my own, would 'stay at home' as housewives whilst the father was working to provide financially for the family. Generally the mums of my friends,

also like my own Mum, were loving; kind; strict and people who made personal sacrifices to make sure that their children were on the 'right path' as life's journey began.

A mother's influence was certainly prominent, it's not that our fathers loved us any less they just expressed their love differently.

Our reading from 1 Kings 3 is a Bible passage that has always fascinated me since I first heard it when I was probably around seven years old. The true birth mother of the living child was prepared to give up her child so that it would live; that love came across as so powerful that she probably would have died for the child herself if asked.

As a parent myself, and if you are parent I'm sure many of you will feel the same, the love for your own child can be immense, I can't think of a better word to describe that love. God also proved how immense His love is for us, his children, by sending His only son, Jesus Christ, to die on a cross so that our sins may be forgiven.

At the time of our Old Testament reading Solomon was rightly considered to be a very wise king. In the verses before today's Bible reading Solomon had humbly asked God for a 'wise and discerning heart' to rule the people of his kingdom following the death of his father, King David. God's response to Solomon's request in 1 Kings Chapter 3 was:

'Since you have asked for this, and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be'.

So impressed was God with Solomon's humility and godliness God also granted Solomon the gifts of 'wealth and honour' and stated:

'.....if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you long life'.

Solomon's wise ruling with the two prostitutes made Solomon a hero and all of Israel, not just part, *all* of Israel 'held Solomon, their king, in awe'.

Israel saw their king as a hero strikingly demonstrating that the Lord had answered Solomon's prayer for a discerning heart, however, can you sense a 'but' coming?

What happened when we, ourselves, strayed from the sage, or sound, advice that our parents imparted to us as children to keep us out of danger or to stop us making bad decisions? Sometimes 'straying from the path' or simply not listening to and heeding advice ultimately led to disaster. Sadly Solomon did stray despite God appearing to him twice forbidding him to follow other gods. Solomon did not keep to the Lord's commands; even 'heroes' can make mistakes.

Solomon did not live a 'long life' as he did not keep God's decrees and commands and died at the age of sixty, ten years younger than his father, David. It is no coincidence that Solomon's later folly led to God's judicial cutting of Solomon's kingdom in two, on Solomon's death, the end of a united Israel. At this point in our talk notice the symbolism between Solomon's wisdom when he threatened to divide the child in two, and Solomon's folly that led to his kingdom being cut in two on his death.

When we didn't, or we don't, follow our parents' advice there could be/ can be consequences. We know that we are not perfect; sometimes we are aware of our own weaknesses, sometimes they have to be pointed out to us. God recognised that Solomon had a weakness for other gods and idols, but did God love Solomon any less? I feel God would have been disappointed with Solomon, but that love of a parent would still be, as described earlier, immense.

Solomon was not insignificant to God nor are we insignificant to God who understands our weaknesses yet still loves us and rejoices when we ask for guidance and help. There is a lyric from the chart hit 'Human' by the pop band 'The Human League' which says:

'I'm only human, of flesh and blood I'm made
Human, born to make mistakes';

And if the lyrics are changed slightly:

'We're only human, of flesh and blood we're made
Human, born to make mistakes';

Sadly, from a world viewpoint, when people don't follow God or listen to the words of a loving God through His only son, Jesus Christ, we see hatred; greed; death and destruction take over. People should not kill, or be killed in the name of religion and most religions do preach 'peace' and 'love', but there is always seems to be a fanatical side to any religion or belief doctrine, Christianity included, and look what happens when the world doesn't listen to God or follow His teachings.

The sacrifice and generosity of God can be personified in our own lives, not just through this period of Lent that focusses our minds on random acts of kindness and the giving of our time and talents, but also throughout the year too. We may consider our small sacrifices insignificant, but God doesn't see it that way. Our kindness and acts of generosity, no matter how grand or subtle, can make a huge difference in the world.

I would like to think that God, as our parent, would look from Heaven and feel proud of each and every one of us for at least trying to following his decrees and commands and advice to the best of our ability. Just as the mother in our Bible reading today was prepared to give her baby away so that it would live, God himself was prepared to sacrifice His only son on a cross to show His immense love for us is a love that endures and lasts forever. **Amen**

PRAYER*

Nurturing God, who gave us an example of unconditional love, we give thanks for our parents, families and friends. Thank you for those who care for us, who sit by quietly, supportively and let us make our own mistakes, who are willing to forgive and encourage us.

Loving God, we pray for those who find Mothering Sunday a difficult day, those who have had difficult experiences of their mother or father, or whose family life is full of conflict, bitterness and recrimination, assure them of your love and bring them peace.

Empathetic God, we pray for those who find Mothering Sunday difficult because they have lost a child, or because they are unable to have much-wanted children. We pray for those who struggle to bring up children alone.

Loving God, whose son died on a cross, be with all those who need you and assure them of your love.

Caring God, we pray for those throughout the world who live in conditions like those experienced by the prodigal son when he lost his money, those who do not have enough water or food or shelter, those whose children die of starvation.

Show us how to care. **Amen**

BLESSING*

Let us rejoice in the knowledge
that God loves us and
welcomes us with open arms.
As the children of God
we take his love into the world
that others may also rejoice
and be part of His family. Amen

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