

# Mothering Sunday Message

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Preacher: Rev. Suzy Kirkham

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning, everyone. Lovely to see you. And a very happy Mother's Day. So, special mention to all those mums who've managed to actually get out of the house on time and drag all the kids here, and also to our mums and our mum-in-laws.

Today is a really special Mother's Day for me. Terry, can you show the first picture? As I'm a granny today, so my baby's had a baby, so I just thought I'd share that with you.

So, I must admit to being a bit reticent when Jess suggested Psalm 23 for the theme, as it's usually used at funerals.

However, as I prayed through it, and read through it, and read various commentaries, it gradually became clearer how apt it is for a Mothering Sunday service. I never really appreciated before now how vivid a description of how God parents us, is articulated in Psalm 23, until preparing for this sermon.

So, this Mothering Sunday, let me encourage you to reflect afresh on its familiar and comforting words. So, along with all the mums and the grannies here today, I really want to thank and acknowledge all the spiritual mothers today.

[ 1 : 25 ] We acknowledge the women who were called mums by their children that they birthed and raised, but we also acknowledge the women who profoundly teach the depth and beauty of motherhood, even if they've never raised their own children.

Some have raised their own children, but their motherhood goes way beyond their own home. They are all spiritual mothers, and are all women that love and invest in someone's story, but nurtures someone's heart and soul.

So, to the women who reflect God's heart to others today, I just want to thank you and honour each and every one of you. So many women come to mind, both near and far, who have had a great impact and influence on my life over the years, and also on the life of my children.

These spiritual mothers have been a great spiritual encouragement to me personally, and also to the church communities that I've been part of, both in the past and now.

So, we're focusing on mothers today, but actually, in this day and age especially, spiritual mothers and fathers are so important for his kingdom. The family of God is for all generations.

[ 2 : 38 ] And today, I want to acknowledge and honour these spiritual mothers, who are such mothers to their church communities, those that nurture and care for people in their own unique way.

And they are such great supporters and encouragers. And I love the way that they cheer people on in their own race. So, I have a personal example here, if Terry could put the next photo off.

So, here we get all my family here. So, this is last year. My daughter, Evie, and her husband, Ali, got married during COVID restrictions. And what we are anticipating of being a bit of a damp squid of a day turned out, in the end, to be a great day of celebration and rather raucous behaviour at times due to the consumption of the Aldi speciality wine.

But we won't go there. If you are listening to this online, you know who you were. But surrounding her here are a group of her spiritual mums and dads that have supported us as a family since we moved down here in 2006.

Kim, the lovely lady stood just beside her with the blonde hair, was her kids' band worship leader from the age of 10. And she's one of the most beautiful and prophetic ladies I've ever known.

[ 3 : 53 ] She never says anything bad about anybody. And this can be a real challenge. She often challenges you in a very gentle but godly way. We know that we're being told off, but it's beautiful how she tells us off.

So the saying in our house would often be not what would Jesus do, but what would Kim do? So that was there. And then Donna and Ray, right at the far end there. They've been friends of ours since the twins and their kids were at nursery together.

And we have supported each other through house moves, kids' struggles at school, illness, bereavement of family members, and helping to care for our kids when I broke my leg in 2008 and supporting us all when Evie was seriously ill and nearly died at the age of 16 after a bodge operation.

So in short, we do life together. And Pam and Wendy, the lady beside Ali and the lady at the end, lovely ladies from our home church who have loved and cared for all of our kids and always been there for a chat, a hug and a prayer.

And the reason that they're all on this picture when all we could have at the wedding was 13 people in May last year, they were the catering team for Evie and Ali's reception. The only ones actually that were qualified were Pam and Wendy and you could tell from the way various people were running around with things.

[ 5 : 15 ] But they all helped and mucked in so that they could be there to support Evie, their spiritual daughter, on her wedding day. And all these people were lovely Christian people that were led by their shepherd and in turn, they impart that to others.

And that is why it's so important to have spiritual mothers in your life. So today I'm talking about the good shepherd. God is the true shepherd and we are to shepherd others from his example.

So what does shepherd mean? The Bible mentions shepherds and their shepherding over 200 times. However, the Hebrew word for shepherding is often translated as feeding.

Shepherds lead to pasture and water and protect them from wild animals. Shepherds guarded their flocks at night, whether in the open or in the sheepfolds, where they counted the sheep as they entered and they took care of the sheep and even carried the weak lambs in their arms.

So today I want to share about Jesus, the good shepherd, as part of the good news of the gospel. In Psalm 23, it describes the Lord as our shepherd and what he has for each one of us who come to him.

[ 6 : 29 ] So what does a shepherd look like when we let him shepherd us? The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me to quiet waters. He refreshes my soul.

He guides me. He's always with me. And even when I walk through the valley, he prepares a table before my enemies. He anoints my head with oil. My cup overflows. His goodness and love follow me forever.

We all have access to these promises and it's such a beautiful invitation for us to put our trust in him, to rest and be refreshed, to see his goodness overflow in our lives.

The promise of a feast and abundance in the presence of our enemies and to let him be the shepherd in our lives. In this scripture, there's so much depth to uncover. When David wrote this, it shows his trust in the Lord, his shepherd.

He knew that the Lord would take care of him, not only to a place of comfort and peace, to not only protect him in times of trouble and provide him food in hard times in the presence of his enemies, but also to provide him with the nourishment necessary for his life's purpose.

[ 7 : 39 ] David knew and trusted his shepherd and the shepherd provides nourishment for all of our callings too. What he has for you will sustain you like nothing else.

So turn your eyes back to him and then the fruit of your life will nourish others. Mothers are a great example of shepherds in our lives.

These attributes of Jesus are also seen through mothers in how mothers give, in how they feed and provide and how they guide and encourage, how they protect, how they empower and how they care for those in their flock and how they sacrifice and many more.

These attributes are all a reflection of Jesus, the good shepherd. If we look at another passage in John, John 10, it says, I'm the gatekeeper. Whoever enters through me will be saved.

They will come in and go out and find pasture. And it says, the thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life and life to the full.

[ 8 : 48 ] So the thief that's referring to someone who enters a sheep pen without going through the gatekeepers. So the characteristics of the thief, the thief wants to deceive and the only motive is to scatter and destroy and to kill and to bring disunity amongst the sheep to lead them away from their shepherd.

So that's why it's so important that you know the shepherd for yourself. And the only way to the father is through the gatekeeper, which is Jesus. And then it says, so it says, I have come that you may have life and life to the full.

So Jesus came so that we can live life to the full under the good shepherd. And finally, it says, I'm the good shepherd. I know my sheep and they know me in the same way the father's known me and I know the father.

Jesus, the good shepherd, knows his sheep. He knows every single one of them. He calls every single one of them by name and he knows you and every single detail about you.

And a mother knows their child's voice and can recognize it when they hear them. And a child knows their mother's voice. A mother's voice is one of the first recognitions, a sound that a baby hears when inside the womb.

[10:00] So our roles as mums or as any of us as spiritual parents from all generations are to know the shepherd and then to show the shepherd through how we live and lead others.

Being the shepherd's voice for the next generation, to speak the voice of Jesus so that all of our children and our spiritual children are being led, nurtured and encouraged by the good shepherd. To know and to show the good shepherd. Jesus always puts his sheep before himself and he's always about the one. As in the parable about the lost sheep, his heart is to gather and Jesus shows his life a sacrifice as how he laid down his own life out of his free will and walking in the authority that was given to him by his father.

So Jesus is the good shepherd. His attributes as the good shepherd are faithfulness, compassion, guidance and protection. And we can also see these attributes through mothers.

As you follow the shepherd, his character, his attributes flow through your life. So my prayer for us all is that we let the shepherd lead us. Let him lead us beside still waters.

[11:14] Let him take us to the oasis of peace and let him bring nourishment to our life's calling. Let him uplift, encourage and enlighten us in truth of your true identity and that you know that you belong to him.

Let him call out the gold in you so that you can call it out in the next generation and in others. Let him guide and empower you to impart wisdom to love and to shepherd you and freely you receive and freely you give.

And I pray that you will lean into the good shepherd so that as you receive him it will overflow out of your life and impact on those around you. And I pray that we all take that responsibility to shepherd others, that you can lead them to green pastures and to the living water and that you can help gather his sheep to nurture, to care and to impart and to speak wise words that build up and edify people and that bring out life.

So as a mother, a spiritual mother, as a son or a daughter, as a child of God, the Father's desire is for all of us to know him and to know his voice.

My favourite verse in the psalm is surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life and I will live in the house of the Lord. That however far off I go, he's constantly pursuing me and he's not going to give up on me and he's not giving up on you too.

[12:46] And when we die, our lives will be even better because we get to spend eternity with God. Psalm 23 reminds us that no matter what we are going through, that we're not alone in the very difficult trials that come along.

I don't know about you, but last year, I couldn't wait for 2020 to be over. But this year, even though, thank goodness, most people have been vaccinated, although numbers are rising, most people are not being really ill.

There's still a lot of scary stuff going on in the world, especially what's happening with Ukraine and Russia and things that we're also, that we're personally worried about. This psalm can also help us to recall that however fearful or worried we are right now, there are many others who find themselves in much greater peril through no fault of their own.

So finally, recognizing that he knows you and he knows your voice, he has given you that voice.

And when you know Jesus, then you know the Father, the Lord, our Shepherd.

Jesus is the perfect representation of the Father. And when you see Jesus, you will see the Father. Amen.