

"Loving Service"

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Preacher: Rev Mike Rattenbury

[0:00] Heavenly Father, as we look into, as we reflect on your word together, we pray that you would speak to us through it. That we would know your presence amongst us through Jesus our Lord. Amen.

! The third mark of mission is to tend, to respond to human need with loving service. And in John chapter 13, we read the account of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. And the occasion is the last supper.

And before they settle down to eat the meal, Jesus goes round taking on the role of a servant and individually washing each and every disciple's feet.

There's a bit of resistance to it, particularly on the part of Peter. That Jesus deals with that and washes every disciple's feet, including Peter's and including Judas's.

[1:16] That's not often, always picked up on. But at the end of it, Jesus then turns to all the disciples and basically says, If I, the Lord, do this for you, you've no excuse for not doing it to one another.

I come as your Lord, but I serve you. You serve one another. And so that is very much reflecting God's mission to this world.

As in John 3.16, God so loved the world that he gave his only son. We respond to human need with loving and sometimes costly service.

And we are called to join with him in his mission. But on Mother's Day, we have another example of how to respond to human need with loving service, reflected in the love that a mother has for her children.

And that too points us to the Lord's own love. So, we're going to look more at Mother's Day and motherhood today.

[2:33] But bear in mind, at the back of your minds, the five marks of mission and that third mark of tend, to care with loving service. There is what's called the image of God, the imago Dei, that we are created in.

And that takes us way back to Genesis, where it says that God made man and woman, Adam and Eve, in his own image. As we read through Genesis and the account of the fall, we see how through Adam and Eve's disobedience, there is that estrangement between them and God.

And that sense that everything from then on is prone to going wrong. But because we have been created in God's image, that image, even though it is spoiled and it is no longer perfect, there are echoes of the nature and the character of God left within us.

We are sinners, but we are sinners created in God's image. And there is that mixture of fallibility and wonder when we look at any human being.

We still take joy in being creative. We still take pleasure in giving, even generously. We still know how to show love and how to protect those who are weaker than ourselves.

[3:57] We still show loyalty. We still have the capacity to forgive and to be forgiven. And in our opening prayer earlier in the service, we reminded ourselves how those expressions of human care and human love point us, albeit imperfectly, to God's own love.

Paul says the same thing in Ephesians chapter 3, verses 14 to 15. And I'm going to read that. For this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

And we see in those verses that Paul recognizes there that all family life can point us to what God is like.

And the better the family life is, the better the parenting is, the easier it is to understand things like security and trust and love.

If we grow up in a loving home, we know what it is to feel secure. We know what it is to feel love. It is so important that family life gets it right. And as we recognize that, we understand more about what God's love must be like.

[5:15] All the good things that we've perhaps taken for granted, but even better. And even bad parenting, because not every family gets it right. Some families are, they fail, they are abusive, they break up, they fall apart.

We live in a fallen world. But even bad parenting can carry some awareness of what it ought to be like, and it's not like this.

Some awareness of how things should be better than they are. And that awareness that this isn't right points us to some idea of what should be right.

And that's not to excuse bad parenting or getting it wrong. But even then, and so many children grow up and say, well, it wasn't great for me, and I want to get it right for my kids when my turn comes.

But we are created in God's image, and there is that balance of fallenness and fallibility and proneness to getting it wrong. And still, the capacity to point to what God's love is really like.

[6:21] And we get that in those insights into motherhood that we used as our lead-in prayer, our thanksgiving prayer, earlier in the service. And I want to take time today, perhaps for us to remember our own mothers.

Whether they got it right or they got it wrong. Whether they were warm and loving and caring. The best mum in the world, and mums we really miss in many cases.

Or whether things weren't always easy. And in my own upbringing, I had quite a stormy relationship with my mum until I left home. And then it got really good.

So I've got a mixture of both that we didn't really get on when I was a teenager. We got on fantastically well when I was a grown-up. So I've got a mixture of memories, most of them now good.

But life's like that, isn't it? We address God as Father, but we shouldn't overlook how motherhood also reflects God's nature.

[7:24] We're told, Jesus says, when you pray, say, Our Father. But we have all these passages here where the Lord likens his love to that of a mother as well.

And today I'm not going to say much more than that. But more to give time to reflect on these scriptures. And to remember, and to understand, and to appreciate, and to give thanks for our own mums.

First of all, I'm going to read those verses again, or just the statement from Isaiah 66, verse 13. Where Isaiah prophesies in the Lord's name and says, As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you.

Isaiah, quite simply, compares God's care for us to a mother's comforting and carrying us in her arms.

And perhaps, to direct our thoughts and our memories, go back into your own childhood. And can you think of any memories where something went wrong and your mum comforted you?

[8:39] Can you remember that? Do you have any memories just to reflect on? You're a small child. Perhaps you've fallen over or got lost or something that broke the toy.

A mum gives you a cuddle. A mum gives you a cuddle.

And Isaiah says, As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you. That wasn't the only time that Isaiah used mother as a picture for God's love.

In Isaiah 49, he says, Can a mother forget the baby at her breast? And have no compassion on the child she has born. That is the assumption, the expectation.

But Isaiah is realistic again. Though she may forget, I will not forget you. Isaiah recognises how God never forgets us.

[10:03] And he knows each of us. And cares for each of us as dearly and as intimately as a mother knows her own children.

I wonder how many of you, how many of us have got memories of being lost. About slipping away in a crowd and just that sense of lostness.

And then of being found. And mum's reaction. When she knows that we're safe. Might clatter us as well.

But again, that mixture of crossness. Of relief. And generally everything is now okay.

You're found. You're found. Some of us might recognise, recollect that with our own children as well.

[11:12] Well. David felt so at peace in God's presence.

He likened that to a child being safe in loving arms. But I have calmed and quietened myself. I am like a weaned child with its mother.

Psalms 131 verse 2. Weaned, possibly it might mean fed. But again, that recollection from our childhood memories.

Some of those memories for some of us many decades ago. Was there always food on the table?

That we took for granted. And that sense of feeling safe. And do we feel safe in God's presence?

[12:40] Is that something that we delight in? Even here, as we worship together. But in all circumstances of life.

That sense that we are being looked after. Jesus compared himself to a mother as well.

Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem. How often have I longed to gather your children together. As a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. Jesus. But you were not willing.

Jesus again likens himself to a mother. Longing to wrap his arms around us. But on this occasion.

That's not welcome. And again, perhaps we've got memories. Of what we were like as children.

[13:48] Perhaps as teenagers. Of children having tantrums. So angry. So cross. Of being stroppy teenagers.

Not wanting to know. Wanting our own way. Wanting out. A sad trial to our mums and dads we might have been at times.

And Jesus wept over Jerusalem. Because that was. A much deeper and darker rejection.

But there is still that desire in the Lord's heart. To draw us to himself. And we're pointed.

In that verse. To the grace of God. Reaching out to us. When we don't deserve it. And when for so long. We are so resistant to it.

[14:52] But Lord we thank you. For your persistence. And your patience. Until. We did turn to you.

Amen. And the first of the readings. That we had read earlier.

Going back to Exodus. Pharaoh ordered. Every Hebrew boy born. You must throw into the Nile.

And now a Levite married. A Levite woman. And she gave birth to a son.

And she hid him for three months. Moses' mother risked her life for Moses. For as long as she possibly could. And God too.

Is our protector. And God's hand was on Moses' life. And saw him safely through. Even beyond the limits of what his mum could do.

[15:56] God continued to watch over Moses. But perhaps. And those of us who are. Very much older.

With wartime or post-war memories. Rationing. But perhaps later on as well. Of parents making sacrifices. To give us a good start in life.

It might be wartime rationing. Unevenly shared out. So that we didn't go without. Of parents going without things.

To give us a good start in life. The sacrifices that mums make. And dads too. That perhaps we. Weren't aware of at the time.

Or took for granted. But again Lord. They reflect your love. And that last reading.

[16:59] From Luke 2. Simeon blessed them. And said to Mary his mother.

This child is destined. To cause the falling and rising. Of many in Israel. And a sword will pierce.

Your own soul too. Just that recognition. That. Even when things are right. And going according to plan.

They're not always easy. And how mothers care deeply. About their children. And perhaps again. We too. Remembering far back.

Think of that care. And mothers worrying about us. Sometimes we thought needlessly. But again a reminder. How might God. Feel about us.

All these passages. Can inform and challenge us. About what it is to be a mother. And a father. And what it is to be children. And how we respond.

[18:01] Or responded to our own parents. And how we are called. To share in God's mission. To tend. To care.

To show patience. As perhaps our mums and dads. Showed patience for us. And how our love. As far as it can.

Can model God's love. And point to him. And draw others to him. May that be so. Amen.