

## 14 May 2023 – Mother's Day/Christian Family

### Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement

As we gather for worship in Jesus' name, we remember that we do so on the traditional and unceded territory of the ləkʷəŋən and the WSÁNEĆ. We acknowledge their stewardship of this land throughout the ages. As we pray, reflect, and celebrate in this place, we do so as guests lamenting injustice and asking God to lead us along paths of reconciliation – inspiring new relationships of respect and solidarity.

### † A Mother's Day Prayer

Holy God, we pray for ...those who gave birth this year to their first child

– **we celebrate with them**

...those who lost a child this year

– **we mourn with them**

...those who are in the trenches with little ones every day and wear the badge of food stains

– **we appreciate them**

...those who experienced loss this year through miscarriage, failed adoption, or running away

– **we mourn with them**

...those who walk the hard path of infertility, fraught with pokes, prods, tears, & disappointment

– **we walk with them and beg forgiveness for the times we say well-intentioned but foolish things**

...those who are foster moms, mentor moms, and spiritual moms

– **we need them in our community**

...those who have warm and close relationships with their children

– **we celebrate with them**

...those who have disappointment, heartache, and distance with their children

– **we sit with them**

...those whose mothers died this year

– **we grieve with them**

...those who experienced abuse at the hands of their own mother

– **we acknowledge their experience**

...those who lived through driving tests, medical tests, and the overall testing of motherhood

– **we are better for having them in our midst**

...those who will have emptier nests in the upcoming year

– **we grieve and rejoice with them**

...and to those who are pregnant with new life, both expected and surprising

– **we anticipate with them.**

This Mother's Day, we walk with all mothers and ask your blessing upon them, O God. **Amen**

Call to Worship

Let us see you this day, O God;

**Come to us as light.**

Let us hear you this day, O God;

**Come to us as truth.**

Let us sense your presence, O God;

**Come to us as love.**

Come and let us worship, God.

**We have come to rejoice in God, our Saviour.**

† Gathering Prayer / Words of Hope

God of life, we praise you this day for the gift of your creation as new life rises around us in flower beds and farmers' fields, in the nests and burrows of your creatures. We praise you for the gift of our lives, and for all those people – from our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents to our teachers and coaches and good friends – who have encouraged us along the way. In this time of worship, encourage us in the present moments of our lives, challenging as they may seem.

God of love, we are grateful for the love you bless us with in our homes and families. Yet you know family life is not always easy. Our love for each another gets strained some days. Forgive us if we have taken our family for granted. Give us grace to repair relationships where strain is showing. Refresh us again with the new life you promise. Amen

Hear the good news! Christ died for us; Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us. Believe the good news of the gospel. In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven and set free to love more fully by God's generous grace

† Prayer for Understanding

**O Speaker of the Word, speak into our disorganized minds a word of clarity. Speak into our splintered hearts a word of wholeness. Speak into our wayward wills a word of truth. Amen!**

Scripture **Acts 17: 22-31** [NT 137]

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the

objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him – though indeed he is not far from each one of us.

For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.' Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals.

While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

### **Psalm 66: 8-20** [responsive/displayed]

Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of God's praise be heard, who has kept us among the living, and has not let our feet slip.

**For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried.**

You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs; you let people ride over our heads.

**We went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.**

I will come into your house with burnt offerings; I will pay you my vows, those that my lips uttered, and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.

**I will offer to you burnt offerings of fatlings, with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams; I will make an offering of bulls and goats.**

Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what the Lord has done for me.

**I cried aloud to God and extolled the Lord with my tongue.**

If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened and has given heed to the words of my prayer.

**Blessed be God, who has not rejected my prayer or removed steadfast love from me.**

### **1 Peter 3: 13-22** [NT 234]

Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?

But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.

And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you – not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

### **John 14: 15-21** [NT 109]

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.

On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

## Message

Did you know that Mother's Day began in the late 1800's as a peace movement? Julia Ward Howe wrote the *Battle Hymn of the Republic* – an anthem carried by Union Soldiers. It speaks of her view of God's divine will for the Union Army to be victorious. Later she began a tradition centered on peace – thinking of mothers on both sides of the American Civil War who lost their sons. Mrs. Howe declared Mother's Day as a day to celebrate peace and honour mothers. This tradition was continued by Anna Jarvis, devoted activist and mother, who founded the Mother's Day celebration that is familiar to us today as an act of peace and resistance.

While this has become something of a "Hallmark holiday," the roots of Mother's Day are in Christian Peace movements – and so we take note – we honour, celebrate and remember. Think about the current armed conflicts around the world – Ukraine, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Columbia, Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, Yemeni, Israel/Palestine – displaced people, refugees, genocide – and on it goes. When we think of the peace roots of Mother's Day let's remember all those – mothers and fathers – sisters and brothers – wives and husbands – children, who have lost loved ones in war. Let us remember and work always towards peace.



This picture from KAIROS shows Kelly Campo from the Organización Femenina Popular (OFP) in Colombia sharing yellow flowers with participants of the *Memory Walk* to remember the many victims of violence from the Magdalena Medio Region during Colombia's decades long war.

In Colombia, violence and insecurity continue, despite support from the current government for the peace process. In this setting, the OFP continues to play a crucial role in the recovery of displaced families. They provide counselling, legal support, human rights training, accompaniment, and education. When a woman is educated and supported, she is empowered. She can then make her own decisions, raise the standard of living for her family, create more job opportunities, and help heal her community.

I want to encourage us all to consider giving a different kind of gift in celebration of mothers today – a gift to support women peacebuilders who don't give up even in the face of violence! Through KAIROS' Women, Peace and Security program your donation will have four times the impact. What a meaningful and environmentally friendly way to show your love!

Jesus says to his disciples, *If you love me, you will keep my commandments*. If I live in you and you in me, you will follow my example – do the things I have taught you – love and value and act in ways that show divine love in the world. Nurturing, advocating, and supporting peace efforts is one way to show our commitment to Jesus – to love and follow the way of Christ.

I wonder about this conversation that Jesus is having with his disciples. We just catch the beginning of a couple of chapters of theological discourse between the Last Supper and his Crucifixion. It is a bit dense and overwhelming to tell the truth, but I appreciate that he begins with a call to love and a promise of solidarity.

Sunk right into the middle of the verses we read this morning is a powerful phrase: *I will not leave you orphaned*. We hear the voice of Jesus speaking to his disciples – but we might also hear a mother – any parent – whispering to their child. We may hear the words in our head as we recommit to being present for our own children – or for others in our chosen family whom we love and support: *I will not leave you orphaned* – a piece of me is always with you – in you.

Let's imagine we are there with the gathered disciples, listening to Jesus say he is leaving and then speaking words intended to reassure. I think it is an evening of significant disorientation and bewilderment for the disciples. Their little world is falling apart. Everyone is sad – perhaps crying or staring numbly in grief or pacing in angry dismay.

Imagine some special family and friends event with everyone gathered – expecting familiar tastes and sounds – laughter and sharing and joy. Then it explodes into something quite different as someone drops a bombshell – announces a marriage breakdown – reveals a shocking secret – confirms a terminal illness. There would be tears and confusion and anger and uncertainty almost too great to bear.

The upper room that night must have been something like that. An evening that started out as a normal Passover meal has become something quite disquieting. One of them slinked from the room only minutes ago with dark clouds of betrayal following him out the door. The leader among their little band of followers – Peter – has just been informed

that very soon he will be the first to jump from the sinking ship of Jesus' way – denying the one he loves.

And so, as Jesus talks about the Holy Spirit and all the other things he talks about, he is staring into moist eyes – looking at Peter shaking his head and muttering skeptically – at Philip who seems about as befuddled as a human being can be. There is fear in the room – very nearly panic.

And out of that atmosphere – into that stretched atmosphere – Jesus is motivated in love and compassion to say, "My friends, I will not abandon you. *I will not leave you orphaned.* Please stop crying – please stop being so afraid. It's going to be okay. Really! I know this looks and sounds bad – parts of what is to come will be bad – but in the end I will be with you in a way you cannot imagine right now. This Holy Spirit really will help. Through the Spirit you truly will understand and be connected to me in a living way. It is going to be okay, my dear friends."

Here at the Passover table, Jesus spills out his last words to his closest friends. We can imagine Jesus calling them to remember the wondrous wisp of glory they have shared – when light came into the darkness of the world. With such a song the disciples could go on – sustained by the memory of this one great life – waiting and hoping for Jesus' soon return. And in and through everything Jesus keeps lacing his speech with dark intimations of death and a sudden departure.

John wrote these words long after Jesus was gone. This gospel is written backwards, in the midst of a community for whom Jesus was only a memory. Most, if not all, of those in John's community had never met Jesus. Most, if not all, the disciples were dead. The temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed – a sign for many that the end-time would soon come. But the end-time didn't come. Life went on and that was, in many ways, the hardest part of all. Jesus hadn't returned even when all the signs seemed right. This community of believers felt pushed to the very edge of despair, and despair could defeat them. The gospel writer knew the dangers of such despondency. So it was that John pulled together many of the things Jesus said into this group of chapters known as "*The Farewell Discourses.*" It's a bit like "The Last Lecture Series" in some colleges, where professors are asked what they would say if they knew it was their last chance to speak. Here at the table, Jesus says:

*If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*

*A new commandment I give you, that you love one another as I have loved you.*

*Whoever does not love me does not keep my words.*

*I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.*

"But how can we do that?" the disciples wonder. They have a hard time loving each other now – while Jesus is with them – how could believers love like that in John's community where memory is fading? How can we love like that today?

Can't we just remember the good ole days when Jesus was on earth and love abounded? Let's just keep singing about days gone by – that time when Jesus was here.

But Jesus did not call the disciples to hold up his life as mere memory – he insists on presence. Jesus is calling his disciples to live and love in ways that seem impossible. They can't do it without the Advocate – the Spirit. "I will not leave you orphaned," Jesus says. He appoints a guardian – a helper – the Holy Spirit. You are not alone. Jesus has a plan to be with his friends – with the believers during John's time – with us – in a different way.

The Spirit – which blew like a wind over the face of the deep in creation – took on flesh in the one who now sits with them at the table. This Living Word has just knelt to wash their dirty feet. You can't get much more down-to-earth than that. Jesus is very clear: the Spirit that dwells in me will abide also in you.

Jesus speaks these words into hurting, confused, and disoriented hearts. For us to avoid a similar hurt and confusion, we need the Spirit now as much as ever! Even as God breathed into lifeless clay to create a living person – the Spirit breathes the presence of Jesus into you. In the power of the Spirit, Jesus continues to be present.

Jesus promises his disciples that he will not abandon them to the loneliness of the world's dark night. He says, "I will not leave you orphaned." And he has not. He has come to us in the visible Body of Christ in the world – the church. Even all these centuries – two whole millennia later – we are not orphans. We are not alone.

We are called to be the church in the world. We are called to stand up and stand out in the midst of the world's cold and prickly winter of loneliness and division as a unique and warm place of community and acceptance – of forgiveness and love. We are called to be the advocates that Julia Howe and Anna Jarvis exemplify in nascent peace movements – to remember that in celebrating mothers today we are taking a stand for peace and justice in a broken world.



If we live and love as Jesus did – with gentleness and reverence – the love that comes to us through the Spirit will overflow into the lives of others. We will be agents of God’s love in the world – our lives, evidence of the presence of the Spirit in our midst.

We are not left alone – we are not abandoned or orphaned – we are Easter people. If we remember this, we can be those to whom grieving or searching souls come for comfort, encouragement, and strength because they sense God’s presence and God’s Spirit in and among us – inspiring and sustaining the life we share – nourished for ministry in the world God loves.

Thanks be to God. **Amen**

➤ *For all the love*

*440 (tune: 611)*

Offering and Prayer     *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*     **306**

The Apostle Paul declared that in God, we live and move and have our being. We offer our gifts to God in thanksgiving for all we enjoy in life, praying that our generosity will become a blessing throughout all God’s precious creation.

**Holy One, you made us in love to share that love with neighbour and stranger as Jesus commanded. Take our gifts and make them tokens of your love we can share throughout our community and in the world you love, in Jesus’ name. Amen**

† Pastoral Prayers & the Lord’s Prayer     (response: God with a loving heart – **hear our prayer.**)

God of homes and families, this Sunday we give you thanks for our families, especially remembering mothers, grandmothers, great grandmothers. We are grateful for their love and attention, their hard work and the deep hope they have cherished for each one of us. We honour before you each one who has mothered us and now lives with you in your eternal care. And we ask your blessing on each one in our family who continues to care for us, cook for us and worry about us.

God with a loving heart – **hear our prayer.**

God of connections and compassion, today we thank you for our friends and relations, for the neighbours and fellow citizens who help to make our lives complete. We thank you for glad times shared, helping hands offered, commitments honoured. And we pray for those around us facing particular challenges this day...

God with a loving heart – **hear our prayer.**

God of courage and new possibility, today we pray for all those who feel life or love slipping through their fingers, for those who face the loss of good health, and for those who face the loss of good times. We pray for communities facing upheaval through natural disaster and human misjudgement, and for countries facing economic turbulence and environmental collapse...

God with a loving heart – **hear our prayer.**

God of forgiveness and renewal, today we pray for those caught up in relationships in need of repair and for all who seek peace and seek to make peace. We pray for families, churches, communities and countries caught up in division. Send your Spirit to bring peace to troubled lives.

God with a loving heart – **hear our prayer.**

As those who seek peace in Jesus' name, we pray together the words he taught... ***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 debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen***

➤ ***Lord of all power***

**626**

### Blessing

As you go to engage in divine work in the world, know that you are not alone. The presence of the Advocate – the Comforter – dwells in you. May the grace of the risen Lord, the love of God and the nurturing community of the Holy Spirit embrace us all. Amen

➤ ***Jump with joy***

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<sup>i</sup> Adapted from *Lighting the Flame: A resource Book for Worship* by Charles Cammarata, 1997