

14th March 2021 – ‘Mothering makes the world go round’

led by Rev Kate Whyman

GATHERING MUSIC Dancing On Tiptoes, Rachel Bruerville

<https://youtu.be/y2IEbox3JSM>

WELCOME AND CHALICE LIGHTING

Welcome everyone. March is a month of special days, and today I wish you a very happy Mothering Sunday, if you're a mother ... and also if you're not. Because this is a day, too, to remember our mothers, as well as our grandmothers, our great-grandmothers – in fact all our ancestors who have, by their being, made our being possible. Special mention to our member Ann who became a grandmother again this week, to baby Kala. This is a day that also invites us to give thanks for ALL those who have nourished us, and cherished us, and stood by us along life's way.

And so now, as is our custom, I'll light our chalice, as a symbol of our free religious faith.

If you have a candle you might like to light yours with me now.

We light this flame for all mothers; for Mother Earth who sustains us, and for the Great Mother who holds us all in loving embrace, always. Amen

First hymn 141 (P): She comes with mother's kindnesses

She comes with mother's kindnesses
and bends to touch and heal.
She gives her heart away in love
for those who cannot feel

She comes with lover's tenderness
to answer love's appeal.
She gives her body with her heart
to make her passion real.

She comes with worker's faithfulness
to sow and reap and spin.
She bends her back in common task
to gather harvest in.

She comes with artist's joyfulness
to make and shape and sing.
She gives her hands and from them grows
a free and lovely thing.

She comes, a child in humbleness,
and trust is in her eyes.
And through them, all of life appears
in wondering surprise.

She comes with sister's carefulness
strong to support and bind.
Her voice will speak for justice' sake
and peace is in her mind.

She comes with power like the night
and glory like the day.
Her reign is in the heart of things –
Oh come to us and stay.

PRAYER by *Victoria Weinstein, UUA minister*

We reflect in thanksgiving for all those whose lives have nurtured ours.
The life-giving ones
Who heal with their presence
Who listen in sympathy
Who give wise advice ... but only when asked for it.

We are grateful for all those who have mothered us
Who have held us gently in times of sorrow
Who celebrated with us our triumphs -- no matter how small
Who noticed when we changed and grew,
who praised us for taking risks
who took genuine pride in our success,
and who expressed genuine compassion when we did not succeed.

On this day that honours Mothers
let us honour all mothers
men and women alike
who from somewhere in their being
have freely and wholeheartedly given life, and sustenance, and vision to us.

Dear God, Mother-Father of us all,
grant us life-giving ways
strength for birthing,
and a nurturing spirit
that we may take attentive care of our world,
our communities, and those precious beings
entrusted to us by biology, or by destiny, or by friendship, fellowship or fate.

Give us the heart of a mother today. Amen

May we pause also to pray for two mothers in the news at the moment: Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, whose 6 year-old-daughter is still waiting for her to come home; and the mother of Sarah Everard - her daughter will never come home.

Pause

As we think about mothering in its broadest context today, I'd like to start with a reading, which those of you at a recent Heart & Soul will recognise. I'd like to share it here now as I think it speaks powerfully to the way we might mother ourselves, and each other.

READING: My commitments to myself, Laura Mancuso (Interfaith minister)

I take care of myself first, because I am deserving of exquisite care.

I take care of myself to maintain the capacity to help others.

I move and stretch my body every day.

I spend time in nature, attuning my senses to the earth's wisdom.

I ration my daily exposure to the news. I identify and access credible sources of information.

I protect myself from becoming overwhelmed by information about the pandemic.

I pace myself.

I sit with the reality of uncertainty and impermanence, and allow it to temper my desire for control.

I listen without judgment to others' reactions, which may be different from mine.
I forgive myself and others when stress brings out our shadow selves.
I feel fear fully when I am fearful.
I experience sadness fully when I am sad.
I allow anger fully when I am angry.
I relish joy fully when I am joyful.
I seek out healthy pleasures and indulge in them without guilt.
I remind myself that feelings are transient states that move through me. They do not last.
And they do not define me. Nor do my thoughts.
I balance my drive for self-improvement with compassionate acceptance of myself as I am right now.
I initiate contact with loved ones to let them know I hold them in my heart.
I seek out, with increased sensitivity, those who are the most vulnerable.
If possible, I share my resources with those who need help to survive.
When possible, I move away from people, situations, and experiences that do not serve my highest good.
I strengthen my connection to my sources of spiritual strength so that I continue to be replenished.
I acknowledge the nearness of death as a key motivator for living a full life.
I pray for the suffering of all beings to cease.
I grieve my losses and celebrate my successes.
I remain open to new ways of being, surprising sources of joy, and unanticipated discoveries every day.

REFLECTION *followed by music*

As we come to a time of silence and music, you might like to write in the chat box this week, something you commit to doing to take care of yourself.

Claire de Lune, Philip Croft

<https://soundcloud.com/fingersphil/clair-de-lune-abridged-debussy>

STORY: And now a creation myth, from the Dreamtime, *adapted from an Aboriginal creation story from Australia. A story of how life was 'mothered'.*

When the earth was newborn, it was plain and without any features or life. There were no rivers or mountains, no trees, no grasses, only flat red earth as far as the eye could see—except that there were no eyes for seeing. Waking time and sleeping time were the same. There were only hollows on the surface of the Earth, which one day would become waterholes. Around the waterholes were the ingredients of life.

Underneath the crust of the earth were the stars and the sky, the sun and the moon, as well as all the forms of life, all sleeping. All the tiniest details of life were present, yet not awake or alive: the head feathers of a cockatoo, the thump of a kangaroo's tail, the gleam of an insect's wing, the rustle of eucalyptus leaves in the wind.

A time came when time itself split apart and sleeping time separated from waking time. This moment was called the Dreamtime. At this moment everything started to burst into life.

The sun rose through the surface of the Earth and shone warm rays onto the hollows, melting ice which became waterholes. Under each waterhole lay an Ancestor, an ancient man or woman who had been asleep through the ages. The sun filled the bodies of each Ancestor with light and life, and the Ancestors began to give birth to children. Their children were all the living things of the world, from the tiniest grub wriggling on a leaf to the broadest-winged eagle soaring in the blue sky.

Rising from the waterholes, the Ancestors stood up with mud falling from their bodies. As the mud slipped away, the sun opened the Ancestors' eyelids. They saw the creatures they had made from their own bodies. Each Ancestor gazed at their creation in pride and wonderment. Each Ancestor sang out with joy: "I am!" One Ancestor sang "I am kangaroo!" Another sang "I am Cockatoo!" The next sang "I am Honey-Ant!" and the next sang "I am Lizard!"

As they sang, naming their own creations, they began to walk. Their footsteps and their music became one, calling all living things into being and weaving them into life with song. The ancestors sang their way all around the world. They sang the rivers to the valleys and the sand into dunes, the trees into leaf and the mountains to rise above the plain. As they walked they left a trail of music.

Then they were exhausted. They had shown all living things how to live, and they returned into the Earth itself to sleep. We don't see them, but they are still present in every sacred place, and their music still hums through the world. In honour of their Ancestors, the Aborigines still go Walkabout, retracing the steps and singing the songs, connecting this waking time to the Dreamtime.

Second hymn 183 (P) We are daughters of the stars

We are daughters of the stars, we are sons of the earth;
we are spinners and weavers in this web of life;
and the joy that we weave reaches out beyond the stars
and deep within the centre of our being.

We are daughters of the orchards, we are sons of the field;
we are planters and reapers in this web of life;
and the vision that we weave reaches out beyond the stars
and deep within the centre of our being.

We are daughters of tomorrow, we are sons of our dreams;
we are planners and builders in this web of life;
and the future that we weave reaches out beyond the stars
and deep within the centre of our being.

ADDRESS

Did you know that Mothering Sunday is always on the 4th Sunday of Lent, which this is? If not, you do now? Churchgoers would usually gather at their nearest parish or 'daughter church', but centuries ago it was considered important for people to return to their home or 'mother' church once a year. So each year in the middle of Lent, which is now, everyone would visit the main church or cathedral of the area. Of course, the return to the 'mother' church became an occasion for family reunions when children who were working away returned home. (It was quite common in those days for children to leave home for work once they were ten years old.) So it's possible that it was the return to the 'Mother' church which led to the tradition of children, particularly those working as domestic servants, or as

apprentices, being given the day off to visit their mother and family. As they walked along the country lanes, we can imagine how children might have picked wild flowers to take to church or give to their mother as a gift.

Which sounds very charming. Or rather grim. We might think 'well thank goodness that young children aren't sent to work these days'. Until we remember that of course many children, all over the world, still are.

But at least there is a history to Mothering Sunday that isn't simply commercial. And of course the reunion of families is still an important part of the tradition. I'm sure many of you would normally gather with your families, for lunch perhaps, and maybe you're feeling sad that this isn't possible today – or at least not in the usual way. Or then again, maybe you're relieved – let's be honest, families can be complicated too.

For many of us our own mothers are no longer here but there will be plenty of memories of them, of the years that were shared, and of previous Mothering Sundays stretching way back to our childhoods.

Perhaps this day makes us feel motherless.

I remember when I lost my own parents in quite quick succession when I was 39 or 40 years old, I felt orphaned. Which seemed ridiculous as I was a fully-grown adult. But the loss of parents can be jarring at any age. I suddenly felt cut loose and abandoned. It can be a shock to realise that you are suddenly the oldest generation – that there is no one above you any longer.

And so whatever our situation, it's important to remind ourselves that we receive mothering from different directions throughout our lives. Not only from ourselves, as we heard earlier, but from other family members, from friends, pets, teachers, guides, therapists, health professionals, church. We are mothered by people we know and love but also by strangers. In fact by anyone who listens and cares, who encourages and nurtures us in any way. (I was thinking just now of hairdressers. I *love* having someone else wash my hair. Especially getting a head massage. That's a bit of mothering I really miss.)

In turn we mother, whether we're actually mothers or not. We pour out love and energy, into our children, our families, our friends, our pets, our work, our communities, our passions and

projects, our gardens and allotments, our art and music, our writing and reading and learning and exploring – whatever it is we're doing that moves or inspires us. We are always in the act of gestating or giving birth or actively mothering someone or something; always creating, always loving, nourishing and nurturing in our own ways.

And perhaps that's not surprising because that is the very nature of things. It is the rhythm of life. You could say we have been mothered through the entire process of evolution, from the big bang to first life to the apes, and through our ancestors to ourselves – we have been gestating for around 14 billion years in order to arrive here, as we are, now. And still we are mothered every moment of our lives by nature – Mother Nature, as we aptly describe her. By the air we breathe, by the water we drink, by the earth we stand on and the sun that warms us – by this entire planet and the universe in which it spins and turns. That's as true in aboriginal Dreamtime mythology as it is in our own more scientific version of creation.

And all the time, pulsing and throbbing and driving it all, there is Spirit, God, that force of Life and Love, by whatever name – that desires for us to live, and to take care of ourselves, to grow and to be happy, to flourish. The Divine Mother, who wants nothing more than for us to play nicely together, to share our toys and our gifts, and to tidy up after ourselves; who asks us to be grateful for all we have, and to look after all we are given; who yearns for us to discover who we are, to find our passions, and our place in the world. The Great Mother of us all, who wants what any mother would want for her blessed child - which is each and every one of us. May it be so.

CLOSING WORDS

May you go gently into the coming week.

May you remember that you are loved, and that you *are* love.

May you receive the gifts of earth and spirit with gratitude,
and be a bountiful 'mother' to yourself and to the world.

Amen.

CLOSING MUSIC The Garden Song

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1oiVEWFHrs>