

Opening Music: 'Adagio, Piano Concerto in one movement' Florence Price
Copy and paste into your search engine to listen https://youtu.be/y_SM-mLGg3M

Welcome: Good morning and Welcome, whether you are here in the church, joining us online, or watching on youtube at a later date. Welcome whoever you are, and however you are feeling, whatever you carry in your heart, and bring with you: cares, concerns or celebrations, sadness or joys, you are welcome.

However we join in, each one of us is part of our community, contributing by being connected in spirit, and all are equally valued. We begin, as is our custom, by lighting our chalice as a symbol of our free religious faith. If you are at home and have a candle, you may like to light it now.

Chalice Lighting: May our light be a symbol of life,
Freely given and constantly nurtured,
Reflected in the love we give to those who depend on us,
Who look to us for warmth and comfort.

Opening Words: Today is the 4th Sunday in Lent, which for centuries has been known as Mothering Sunday, nowadays more often called Mothers' Day. For some people, this might be a difficult day, for various reasons. So, today's Service 'Caring and sharing' will also celebrate other forms of caring, beyond those traditionally associated with birth mothers.

Friday, March 8th, was International Women's Day, so I'm acknowledging that in our opening and reflective music, and closing video, all composed by women, and in these Words, adapted from those of Thandeka. She is American Unitarian Universalist minister, and liberal theologian:

"This common world I love anew, as the life blood of generations who refuse to surrender their humanity in an inhumane world, courses through my veins. May despair be turned to hope as we begin anew the legacy and light of caring."

1st Hymn: Sing Your Faith no. 141 'She comes with Mother's Kindnesses'

She comes with mother's kindnesses
and bends to touch and heal,
She gives her heart away on 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's 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.

Words © Kathryn Galloway b. 1952 Permission applied for.
Tune: 'St Botolph' by Gordon Slater (1896 – 1979)

Prayers:

As we come together, may we find cessation of whatever personal turmoil accompanies us.
We regret harsh words uttered, or healing words left unsaid.
May each of us find strength to endure difficulty; may we find acceptance of those we
may not understand.

And as this season becomes more glorious with each passing day, may we be aware of
each and every miracle around us.

On this day when custom reminds us to remember those who gave us life and nurtured
our early years, let us give thanks for each person, female or male, family or friend who
loved and guided us to be who we are today.

May we find ways to express that love in words and in the ongoing integrity of our lives.
And let us be supporters of each other in this uncertain venture that is our shared life,
that our lives may be strengthened and enriched. *A M E N*

'A Prayer' by Margaret Kirk, a UK Unitarian

Spirit of love, of light, of truth, of freedom
Bring courage to those who so desperately need it at this time of crisis in our world. Our
faith challenges us to remember all those who have fought for freedom against tyranny.
Our hearts go out to those caught up in the suffering that violence brings; especially the
most innocent: the children and civilians everywhere living their lives peacefully.

Let kindness bless their lives – small acts of kindness that we pray will give them
strength, that will ease their fear and anxiety, that will reassure them of those human
values that even in the darkest times, can bring hope and resilience.

Eternal Spirit of love— illumine their lives, protect them, give them strength not to despair, bless them with encircling moments of kindness and compassion that can shine through and bring comfort even in the midst of great suffering. Let it be so. *AMEN*

Time for a story, about an unusual foster mother!

Story: The legend of Romulus and Remus and the she wolf

According to legend, around the first half of the 8th century BC there was a city called Alba Longa, in the Alban Hills in Italy, southeast of where Rome now stands.

Its King, Numitor, had a son, and a beautiful daughter called Rhea Silvia. Trouble arose when King Numitor was deposed by his younger brother Amulius. To protect himself from revenge, Amulius killed Numitor's son. He also wanted to prevent Rhea Silvia from having children, who might seek revenge. So, he forced her to become a Vestal, a priestess to the Goddess Vesta, sworn to virginity.

Despite her religious role, however, Rhea Silvia became pregnant by the God Mars and gave birth to twin brothers, Romulus and Remus. Amulius ordered the infants to be drowned in the river Tiber, but a merciful servant put them in a basket and set it afloat, hoping someone might find it and save them. The basket washed ashore at the foot of the Palatine hill. The 'someone' who found it, was a she-wolf, who suckled and protected the twins, caring for them as though they were her own cubs.

Later, a shepherd called Faustulus and his wife, Acca Larentia, found and reared the boys as their own sons.

Romulus and Remus became leaders of a band of young shepherd warriors. When they discovered their true identity, they attacked Alba Longa, killed the wicked Amulius, and restored their grandfather to the throne.

They decided to build a settlement on the banks of the Tiber River, where the she wolf had saved them as infants. They disagreed on the location and sadly, Remus was killed by his brother. The site chosen by Romulus was developed and he became its first ruler. The city was eventually named "Rome" after Romulus.

The she-wolf who cared for them, also known as 'The Capitoline Wolf', remains one of the most important symbols of Rome. There is a statue of her in the Capitoline Museum, in Rome.



Reading: Plants and People *Anon*

Plants grow best when we pay attention to them. That means watering, touching them, putting them in places where they will receive good light. They need people around them to notice if they are drooping at the edges or looking particularly happy in the sunlight. The more attention a plant receives, the better it will grow.

We need to be noticed in the same way. If we notice that a family member or a friend is drooping, perhaps we can pay some special attention to him or her. All of us need someone to care about how we are and to truly listen to us. We can share and double someone's happiness by noticing and talking about it also. We help the people around us to grow by listening to their droopy edges as well as their bright days. People need this as much as plants need light and water.

2nd Hymn: Purple 14 'Bring many names'

Bring many names,
beautiful and good;
celebrate in parable and story,
holiness in glory, living loving God:
Hail and Hosanna, bring many names!

Strong mother God,
working night and day,
planning all the wonders of creation,
setting each equation, genius at play:
Hail and Hosanna,
Strong mother God!

Warm father God,
hugging every child,
feeling all the strains of human living,
caring and forgiving
till we're reconciled:
Hail and Hosanna,
warm father God!

Old aching God,
grey with endless care,
calmly piercing evil's new disguises,
glad of good surprises,
wiser than despair:
Hail and Hosanna,
Old aching God!

Young growing God,
eager, on the move,
saying no to falsehood and unkindness,
crying out for justice
giving all you have:
Hail and Hosanna.

Young growing God!

Great, living God,
 never fully known,
 joyful darkness far beyond our seeing,
 closer yet than breathing,
 everlasting home:
 Hail and Hosanna,
 Great living God!

Words by Brian Wren b.1936© stainer & Bell Ltd, used by permission.
 Tune Whitechase by Carlton R.Young, b 1926

Meditation - a prayerful reading:

Spirit of Love, gather in your comforting folds all who seek you.....

We think of the mothers who struggle on low wages, in high rise flats, or those whose partners are violent , or come and go, or who are in prison, leaving them with no-one to share the burden. We think too, of all mothers living in war torn countries, fearing so much for their children's safety and their own

We think of those mothers whose children are anything *but* a joy ... causing them anxiety, anger and sadness....

We think too, of those mothers whose children cannot live with them, for whatever reason, or those whose children have died, overturning the natural order of life, causing heart-ache, and regret - may they find the strength to live as fully as they can

Spirit of Love, gather them in your comforting folds ...

We think of all those who are willing to sacrifice so much to raise a child not of their own birthing, whether they be sisters, aunts or grandma's, or 'official' foster-mothers and adoptive mothers: for all these, 'mothering' is no easy task – may they find the strength to love and nurture ...

We think of those fathers raising children alone, or in partnership – may they find enough strength and love to be both father and mother.

Spirit of Love, gather them in your comforting folds ...

Spirit of Love, we give thanks for all those who 'mothered' and nurtured, or in any way had a part in making *us* what we are. May we have strength and love to pass on the best of ourselves to the children coming after us. *AMEN*

Some silence.

Reflective Music: Adagio, Piano Sonata in G minor by Clara Schumann

Copy and paste into your search engine to listen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxz2ajcgfzy>

ADDRESS – “Caring and Sharing”

Good morning, its good to be with you all, in person in this building, and via the technological wonders of Zoom or watching the recording at a later date.

For the mothers, grandmothers and great grandmothers among us, I would wish you a happy Mother's day, or more properly, a happy Mothering Sunday, though for some, it may be a difficult day. If so, I wish you peace in your heart and hope that you find something worthwhile in today's service.

Two years ago, I stood here offering a service for Mothering Sunday. It was only a few weeks since the start of the fighting in Ukraine. I can remember how shocked we were by the horror of that unfolding catastrophe. It was humbling to see that countless people, mostly mothers with children, fleeing the conflict and destruction, were being welcomed into countries all around Europe. So many people opened their hearts and shared their homes, showing true care for their neighbours. Sadly, 2 years on, the mothers of Ukraine continue their struggle. Sadder still, the mothers of Gaza are experiencing even worse in the aftermath of the events of October 7 last year. What is happening is incomprehensible, with parents literally risking their lives among the ruins, to find food for their children. Lets not forget the mothers of Israeli hostages, worrying about the unknown fate of their children and other loved ones. It is truly heartbreaking for all involved, particularly the mothers, on both sides. Many thousands of individuals around the world care about their desperate plight, and are making donations towards aid, and raising their voices for an end to the fighting and the suffering. At long last, some governments seem to be heeding the pleas for humanitarian aid to be brought in quickly, and for an end to the conflict. The news only last night, of a ship carrying food and aid supplies to the area is encouraging. We hope and pray it will arrive very soon, and will be followed by scores more, to save the vulnerable, especially the mothers and their children.

Every one of us has or had, a mother, the woman who gave birth to us physically. Looking around, from the age of many of us here, including myself, its obvious that our mothers are no longer here in body, though they live on in memory. Traditionally, mothers have been the primary care givers and raisers of the children, though other people were often involved. In past centuries, wet nurses, governesses and servants cared for children of the wealthy, presenting clean and content children to their parents for a short time at day's end. For the less well off, extended family shared the tasks, or the children were sent to religious institutions or orphanages. Nowadays, due to circumstances and the changing times, the caregiving role is often shared by many others – grandparents, aunts, older siblings, friends, foster parents, adoptive parents, teachers, and official agencies. All to be celebrated for the parts they play in caring for the youngsters, helping to shape their lives.

Many years ago, when visiting an elderly relative in Bristol, I met a person, let's call her Sue, whose employer had arranged for her to lodge there during her training, because her own parents lived hundreds of miles away. Auntie became a sort of unofficial foster mother. Auntie took Sue under her wing, caring for her as her own daughter, and the two women grew fond of each other. Years later, Sue still called auntie her 'Bristol mum'.

In our story, we heard of an unusual foster mother, the she wolf who found the twins Romulus and Remus cast adrift in the basket on the river Tiber. She nourished and

cared for them so that they survived until Faustulus the shepherd found them. He and Anna adopted them, caring for them until grown. That she wolf has been revered by Romans ever since.

The role of foster parents, whether unofficial like Auntie, or officially arranged by Social Services, is an important one. Fostering can be very difficult work, especially if a child needs an emergency place at short notice, or has been so affected by an unhappy past that they've been unable to trust anyone, and pass to several foster families in rapid succession, at great emotional cost to all involved. There was an organization called Plymouth Family Support Services, which worked with families and children experiencing various problems, including fostered and adopted children. While working there, I heard about the various difficulties these families faced, and how they were helped by our trained support workers. These people, mostly volunteers, cared deeply and gave much of themselves to enable changes for the better in those families. Some shared time with the children, taking them for activities and giving them a chance to talk openly about themselves, a rare and valued experience for them. My next door neighbours (similar age to me) used to be foster parents and sometimes hinted how difficult their task was. It is testimony to their hard work, warm and caring natures and willingness to share their home with these children that some of them are doing well and still keep in touch years later.

There are other ways of showing care. Sharing time and expertise with someone, is a gift which can't be measured in financial terms. A good teacher can change the direction of one's life. One of our science teachers inspired several of us so that we chose careers in science, in the days when fewer girls took that path, so thanks, Miss Perego!

Sharing one's wealth opens up all sorts of possibilities to those with little. Someone who knows what it was like to have very little financially is the singer songwriter Dolly Parton. She grew up in extreme poverty, but has made a fortune from her songs. She is not a mother herself, but has done a lot for many children. She donated millions of dollars to projects which enable young people to develop their potential. Her 'Imagination Library' was started in 1995 to increase literacy in Sevier County, where she grew up. Every child, regardless of income, was sent an age-appropriate book each month until they reached the age of 5.

Within a few years, the 'Imagination Library' program was so successful that it now exists in over 1,800 communities in the United States, Canada, Australia, Ireland, and the United Kingdom. In 2018, she celebrated sending 100 million books to children, and also funds young people through college and funds wildlife projects. We'll hear from Dolly herself in our closing video.

These are purely human concerns. I close by remembering the biggest Mother figure of all, our home planet, Mother Earth. We can show we care by working towards reducing all which harms her and the myriad life forms with which she teems. Millions of people around the world are taking action to prevent further damage: From continuing research into what is happening and how to reduce the worst of the damage, to noisy but peaceful marches and demonstrations in towns and cities; from knocking on doors to raise awareness, to urging banks and financiers to stop investing in fossil fuels, from doing litter picks in local parks to holding global symbolic events like our forthcoming Earth Hour, all are examples of people sharing their hopes and concerns and showing we do

care. We have a long way to go, the road ahead will be bumpy with twists and turns along the way, but I have hope that much can be achieved if we act together and take time to care, to 'mother' our Mother.

As the philosopher Victor Nuovo remarked, 'Whenever we see good mothering we understand, that, although we cannot all be mothers "we can all learn to love like this, tenderly, faithfully, steadfastly, in a way that nourishes, that gives life, that comforts, that seeks to set free, as though we were all mothers to each other.

Tending our own little patch, our church garden, is one small step. We share the calm space with plants and wildlife, with a place for contemplation and a bench to share with a friend or passers by. May our garden and our church be a place of welcome and comfort, like a mother's arms. " Mothering - in the widest sense - is something we all engage in. May it always be so.A M E N

Final Hymn: Sing Your Faith no. 151 'Strong and Steadfast'

Strong and steadfast, heart- affirming,
clear minds set on sure resolve –
what a life do we inherit,
what a world is ours to own.

Friends and lovers, joyful workers
in a common enterprise,
share the future of our planet;
never can we fail the trust.

Brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers –
God by any other name –
how can we not keep our promise
to each other to be true!

Much there is now to endeavor.
Stir our will to seek the way,
God of peace and God of justice,
yours will be our glorious day.

Words © by Peter Sampson b. 1938. Used by permission.
Tune 'Biddulph' by Alan J.T. Myerscough 2009 Used by permission

Closing Words:

Our Closing words from 1 Romans 12, 9-18 were originally chosen by Thelma for a service some years ago. They still hold true today and could be regarded as good advice given by a parent or someone close to any child or young person. They are good advice for the parents too!

“Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with a mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”

Extinguish Chalice**Closing video: Dolly Parton singing “Coat of many colours”**

Copy and paste into your search engine to listen

<https://youtu.be/xedTskJEzZk?si=Kw-ObpoZ5jckXQSF>