

COLLECT

On this Mothering Sunday we give thanks to God for the divine gift of motherhood in all its diverse forms. We pray for all the mothers among us today; for our own mothers, those living and those who have passed away. We remember the mothers who loved us and those who fell short of loving us fully. We pray for all who hope to be mothers someday and for those whose hopes to have children have been frustrated; and for all mothers who have lost children through death, distance or family breakdown. We pray for all women and men who have mothered others in any way. We make our prayer in the name of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Amen

This Lent we have been following a book by Pope Francis called the Joy of Gospel. We have considered the theme of joy which runs through the Bible. At how the Christian faith is filled with a deep and lasting joy. Not a surface joy, which we might call happiness, but a real God-given joy which has its roots in the faith, the trust, that God loves us now unconditionally and will never stop loving us whatever happens. We looked at how we are not just called but compelled to share this joy in mission to a wider world in what Pope Francis calls *pastoral mission* which is about being open to someone else's needs, about listening to others and responding appropriately. We considered the challenges which face us when we respond to this call to spread the Joy of Gospel to the people we meet everyday of our lives. How when faith becomes private and personal, carefully guarded for our own benefit it withers and dies. How we often see *pastoral mission* as an appendage, an add-on extra, to our normal lives rather than central to it. And how too much church mission activity which is spent chasing: a lost glorious past, instead of living in the reality of the present; or believing we have always done it this way, instead of looking at what actually needs to be done now in the present; finally we often chase after the latest *mission* strategy, instead of actually doing *pastoral mission*.

This morning there are no notes but rather a bit of a WORD GAME using the central word JOY which some of us easily associate with Mothering Sunday but not always associate with God or being Christian. One of my favourite quotes from Pope Francis book describes what Christian evangelism often looks like to the world outside our churches. He says: *An evangeliser must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral! Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm, that delightful and comforting joy of evangelising.*

So if I say the word JOY what **feelings** do we associate with it?

- Gladness
- Delight
- Exultation
- Gaiety

JOY makes up other words too. It is an **action** word as well as a feeling word. JOY is in the middle of something we do every time meet as Christians to worship God

REJO[Y]ICE

- Celebrate
- Have a party
- Live it up
- Give thanks

JOY is also part of another word which describes the way in which we turn to God. JOYFUL is a **directional** word.

JOYFUL

- Divine
- Heavenly
- Godly
- Spiritual

So this 4th Sunday in Lent, Mothering Sunday we come back to JOY. A word which is about feelings, about actions, about the direction which our feelings and action move.

Unfortunately, trying to talk about joy in the middle of Lent can make all this joy seem a bit boring. The church is bare of colour, except purple. JOY needs some colour but as we get ready for Easter Church our church, our liturgy, our hymns especially are usually plain at best, dour at worst. If you had heard the opening prayer, the collect set for this 4th Sunday of Lent you will know what I am talking about. But Mothering Sunday, at least in the UK and probably many Commonwealth churches is the exception. Today we bring flowers into church, in the same way I brought in a different opening prayer. We of course take the flowers out again, by giving them away, as we prepare for Holy Week. But for today let us savour our flowers to make our joy more colourful, more bright a reminder to us that our worship of God is JOYFUL!