

PSALMS OF HOPE

@UnitedChurchFerndown



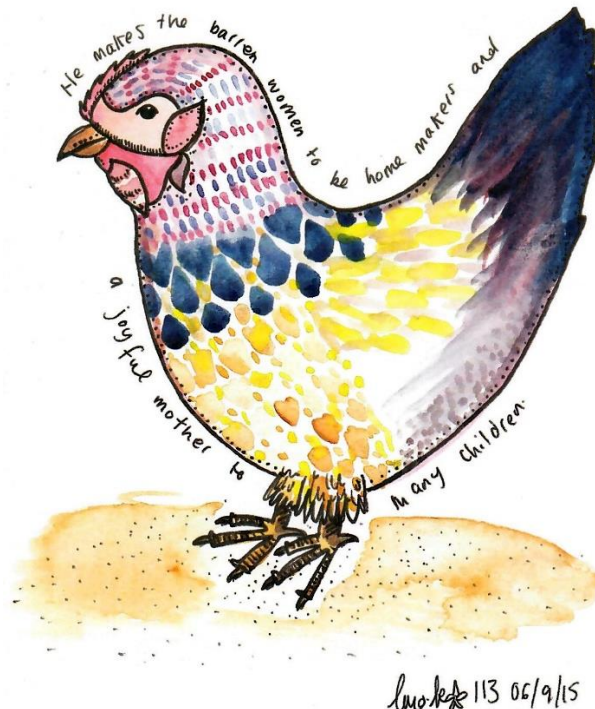
United Church Ferndown's 2023 Lent Programme

Sunday 19th March
Lent 4
Mothering Sunday

Sermon+

Psalm 113

WE ARE FAMILY – PRAISE GOD!



Pray:

We come before the God who inhabits our world and indwells our lives. We need not look up to find God, we need only to look around: within ourselves, beyond ourselves, into the eyes of another. We need not listen for a distant thunder to find God, we need only listen to the music of life, the words of children, the questions of the curious, the rhythm of a heartbeat, the revelations found in his word. Be with us now as we explore this psalm some more. **Amen.**

Introduction:

I love birthdays, Christmas, Easter, first days of... In fact, I love a celebration! Do you have traditions for celebrations? We obviously sing for birthdays. In our house we often sing for most things! As a family we can't wait until people can come round to our house and have BBQs and socialise. There will probably be music and no doubt Team Pike will sing!

On a youth camp we went to, we were all sat around in a circle, 25 of us. As we sat there, we often had another group of kids walk through our pitch and circle to get to their pitch. It was slightly annoying as we were often eating as they barged through, but instead of being sad about it or annoyed, we decided to celebrate the people they were and so every time they walked through our circle, we'd sing to them that wonderful song from One Direction, 'What makes you beautiful?'



Read:

Psalm 113 (NIV)

¹ Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord, you his servants;
praise the name of the Lord.

² Let the name of the Lord be praised,
both now and for evermore.

³ From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets,
the name of the Lord is to be praised.

⁴ The Lord is exalted over all the nations,
his glory above the heavens.

⁵ Who is like the Lord our God,
the One who sits enthroned on high,

⁶ who stoops down to look
on the heavens and the earth?

⁷ He raises the poor from the dust
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;

⁸ he seats them with princes,
with the princes of his people.

⁹ He settles the childless woman in her home
as a happy mother of children.

Praise the Lord.

A consideration of the psalm:

This psalm was written as a celebration song. It was often sung at Passover. It begins by calling on the servants of the Lord to praise his name. God is to be praised because of who he is. He is sovereign. He reigns over the affairs of individuals and of nations. He hands out justice and holds everyone accountable for their acts. We all should acknowledge God, honour him as God and glorify his name. Tragically, most people don't. Jesus explains the path that most take: 'Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few' (Matthew 7:13,14). But even for those of us who are on the narrow way, praising God is hard. I know I struggle to praise God sometimes. Things get too much and life throws a curveball and I just don't want to praise God! I want to scream or shout, I want to cry, I don't want to praise. Yet here it says we should.

Many people will look at this psalm and see the last verse as the verse that jumps out. And quite rightly for Mother's Day, it does: 'He settles the childless woman in her home as a happy mother of children' (verse 9).

Because God is God, he does what is good; and he gives good gifts to his people. James presents a significant truth when he writes, 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change' (James 1:17). God gives what is good; and in the text, God gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. We need to take time to weigh what has just been said. It is a concise statement of the worth of children but also of the role of motherhood.

Sometimes we might feel that children are a curse, especially when they won't do what they are told! When Adam and Eve were punished, God pronounced a curse on them. Some have said that this means that children are a curse. However, God did not say that children are a curse; he said that childbirth would be a painful reminder of the fall (Genesis 3:16).

The Bible presents women as longing for children. For example, Rachel, though loved deeply by Jacob, could bear no children. Her sister, also wed to Jacob through the ruse perpetrated on Jacob by her father, was bearing multiple children. In desperation, Rachel pleaded with Jacob, 'Give me children, or I shall die' (Genesis 30:1^b). She was so desperate that she was willing to insist that her husband sleep with her handmaid in the hope that she could adopt the child as her own (Genesis 30:3-6). Ultimately, God gives them the longed-for child (Genesis 30:22). The child, Joseph, was evidence of God's blessing.

Another instance of the longing for children is witnessed in Hannah, mother of Samuel. The Bible tells us that 'Hannah had no children' (1 Samuel 1:2^b). She was taunted mercilessly by Elkanah's other wife, Peninnah. Elkanah attempted to console Hannah, assuring her that she was loved, but she was inconsolable. In desperation, she pleaded with God, vowing that she would dedicate her son to the Lord for his service from birth. God heard her plea and granted her request, giving her Samuel (1 Samuel 1:1-28).

Among others who saw the birth of a child as evidence of divine blessing is Samson's mother. It is not at all evident that the angel of God appeared by serendipity to announce the birth of Samson. It seems apparent that the Lord granted her a child in response to her plea for a child (Judges 13:1ff). Also, Naomi was overjoyed, as is true for all grandparents, at the birth of Obed (Ruth 4:13-17). However, her joy arose more from the idea that the child was counted as her own child rather than that she was a grandparent. It is obvious that bearing a child was more than mere insurance against old age for Hannah, just as the presence of a child was much more than mere insurance against old age for Naomi. In both cases, the presence of the child was validation of God's blessing on the life of the parents.

With children I have found that the blessings outweigh the challenges and I am grateful that God blessed our home with children. However, I am aware that there are some who might find these words difficult; to some this could be a crushing statement, a statement that makes them not want to praise God! It feels like this teaching might be devaluing women who have not had babies. Or, worse still, to some it will seem that God grants the prayer for children to some barren women but not to all – this is too much! For some people having a child is a definite event that will occur in their life, and so finding out that this may not be possible is heart-breaking for so many. It was not in their plans, and neither was it in God's.

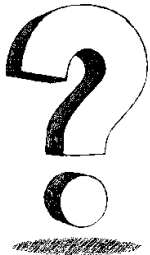
It reminds me of a few churches ago. This elderly, kind couple had been married over 50 years and had been God-fearing since attending church as children. They had done all the church jobs from Sunday School teacher to cleaner, from treasurer to deacon. They were happy, but disappointed that they had never had children. They had been at peace with it for a long time until someone stood up to speak passionately against homosexuality, saying that marriage was for producing children and as gay people could not produce children, their union made God angry. The couple were upset

thinking maybe God was angry with them because they had not produced children. Their feeling that way made us so sad.

Being a mother does not mean birthing a child. Being a mother can mean so much more. In our psalm today, God settles the childless woman in her home as a happy mother of children. Nowhere does it say she birthed these children. I have been blessed with three amazing children, but what I have also been blessed with is numerous other young people who when on youth camp call me mum! Not because they don't love their mums, although some had got tricky backgrounds, but because while they were with me, they felt safe and secure and I was looking after them! What a blessing. I always say that church should feel like an extension of our family. Our family just grows because of the people in the church. Many people who read this may feel that they are not mothers or fathers, but this example shows that God can bless you by being an example and blessing to other people. Maybe not birthed or biological, but people who you influence and care for.

We need to praise God that he gives us so much more than we can possibly imagine and also that he gives it to us in possibly not the way we imagined! If this is the case, we are no less because we received things in a different way to what we expected, just that we are highly blessed that he gave it to us at all.

Questions:



Consider God's word:

1. The name of the Lord be praised v2
2. He raises the poor from the dust v7
3. He settles the childless women in her home v9

Consider Psalm 113's application:

1. Do we praise the Lord's name in all circumstances? How can we strive to do that more?
2. Do we believe that God loves everyone? Sounds easy to accept, but is it?
3. Whom has God given you to 'mother' and how? Are we willing to do this?



Pray together:

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you love each and every one of us equally. We say sorry now for the times when it is difficult to praise your name, but we thank you that you do not judge us about this. We pray now that you help us to praise you even among the storms.

Thank you, Lord, for those people in our lives who care for us and are a great example to us. We pray now that we may be like that to others and have a mothering nature about us.

Amen.