



On your marks

All sorts of people felt they could come close to Jesus, and to the surprise of his close friends that included those on the messy edges of society and even outsiders who came from the countries around Israel. We can read about one such person in the Gospels - a mother determined to get healing for her daughter. She wasn't a Jew but had nevertheless heard about God's power at work in Jesus. This mother was from an area that was part of Syria back then, which disturbed Jesus and his disciples when they were having a break from their busy ministry of teaching and healing. Even Jesus hesitates about helping, but in the end he is impressed by her persistent faith, which put to shame the faith he had found among his own people.

This is perhaps an unexpected story for Mothering Sunday but reminds us that God will always respond to us when we pray, and that sometimes faith is found in unlikely people and places. Even Jesus was taken by surprise. A mother's love for her child is a sign of God's love at work - in all human beings the world over.

As this Gospel story happened in an area that was linked to Syria at the time, it can provide an opportunity for your church to pray for the many mothers from that part of the world who are struggling to care for and love their children, as refugees or still living with fear within their own country.

Get set

You will need:

- small gifts for all the mums and ladies in the congregation.

You can find the story in Mark 7:24-30 or Matthew 15:24-28.

Go!

Today is a special celebration of:

- the gift of children to mothers
- the gift of mothers to children
- the gift of those who show motherly care to any of us in this community.

God has made us so that a mother's care at its very best is a reflection of God's love for us all.

One possible way into the theme

- How does a mum show love?



Mums are always doing! Let's have a quick mum's day mime between us. (*Mime the following actions fast and furiously together.*)

- Get the breakfast
- Sort the school bags
- Drive/walk children to school
- Do some shopping
- Put the shopping away
- Stir the cake ten times with a wooden spoon
- Put the clothes into a basket
- Pile up the dishes
- Tidy up rooms
- Do the hoovering
- Talk on the phone
- Walk/drive to school to pick up children
- Make a cup of tea and sit down
- Make the tea

(Add some more actions to this list as suggested by the congregation... including of course doing a paid job too!)

Another possible way into the theme

- OK, can you guess what I'm describing?

Take flour, eggs and butter.

Mix in a variety of dried fruits.

Put half the uncooked mixture in a tin and then a layer of marzipan before adding the rest.

Decorate when cooked with marzipan and place eleven marzipan balls around the edge

This is the recipe for a Simnel cake - which is often baked for Mothering Sunday or near Easter. Mothering Sunday has been part of the church's tradition for a long time. In days gone by the focus was on the church as the mother and people would go on long pilgrimages to the nearest big church (a cathedral maybe) on Mothering Sunday - those 'in service' in big houses would be given the day off.

- We have just found out the recipe for a Simnel cake but what would be your recipe for a great mum?
- What is the mystery ingredient for a great mum?

Song suggestion

'Thank you Lord for this fine day' - adapting the verses to thank the Lord for mums/those who care.

The story



Imagine how a mother feels if her child is ill and there's no one to help. These days we are lucky: we can phone a doctor, go to a chemist or hospital for help, there are medicines available and plenty of information in books or online to give us an idea of what we should do. In the time of Jesus, there was no such support.

This is the story of a mum from near Tyre and Sidon, which is north of Galilee. (Today, it is in Lebanon but in Jesus' time it would have been part of Syria.) For each line of the story, encourage the suggested actions, sounds or words so that everyone gets involved.

Once there was a mother whose daughter had terrible headaches – *hold head and rock from side to side in pain*

And it was as if there were angry voices in her daughter's head and she just couldn't get rid of them – *call out 'I'm not listening to you' and 'It hurts'*

Mum was desperate. She didn't know what to do – *capture an expression of despair and anguish*

Then she found out that a man called Jesus had come to stay not far from her home. She had heard about him and of the wonderful things he said and did in Galilee. She had an idea – *become excited with the idea of going to meet Jesus with your daughter*

When she arrived, she called out to him and gave him his proper title as the special rescuer from God who was related to King David – *call out 'Jesus, son of David... help my daughter who is ill'*

Jesus' disciples wanted Jesus to have a break from all this healing and so pushed her away – *call out angrily 'Go away'*

But mum would not give up because she loved her child – *call out even louder 'Jesus, please help us'*

Jesus was surprised to hear someone from outside Israel having faith in God like this – *adopt an expression of surprise.*

But Jesus was focused for the moment on rescuing his own people. It wasn't the right time for his rescue to spread to the whole world. He told the mum this – *shake heads to say 'no' to the mum*

But she didn't give up – *call out even louder 'Please, help!'*

Then Jesus said a strange thing. He said that the things he was doing were like food on a table that was just for the Jews for the time being – *shake heads again, as Jesus does not think it is the right time to help this mum*

Then the mum said an even stranger thing. She replied, but even from a meal on a big



table some pieces will fall to the ground for those who aren't up at the table. Can't my daughter catch a crumb from the table? - *hold hands out to catch something.*

Jesus was amazed at her good sense and persistent faith. He said that her daughter would be well because of the mum's faith - *all cheer loudly as the woman sees her daughter healed and well again!*

The most important thing for this mum was that her daughter was healed by Jesus. Mums want the best for their children and the best thing is to bring that child to Jesus.

Song suggestion

'Kum ba yah, my Lord' - using verses like 'This mum's caring, Lord' or 'This mum's crying, Lord'... and 'Jesus hears her cry' and 'Jesus helps her child'

Prayer idea

In the story, a mother brought her daughter to Jesus. Today is an opportunity for all the mums among us to pray that their children will come closer to Jesus; and for all those that have mums with them or can think of their mums in some other way, an opportunity to thank God for the care that their mothers give/gave them.

Invite all the children present to come and collect a small gift that they can give to their mother and all the ladies in the congregation. This may be a flower or other small gift. But before the gifts are passed on, ask everyone to hold the flower/gift up high and to say a big 'Thank you, God' for mothers and others who care for us and who want the best for us.

And when the mothers and others in the congregation have received their flower/gift, ask them to hold the flower/gift up high and say a big 'Thank you, God' for the gift of caring for children/others and the strength that God promises to help everyone to care.

As this story happened in an area that was known as Syria then, show a map of the Middle East with Syria marked on it and ask everyone to join their prayers together to pray for the mothers and the children caught up in the fighting and as refugees in this war-torn part of the world.

Song suggestion

'We really want to thank you, Lord' - adding a verse such as 'We thank you, Lord, for our mums who care/keep us safe and show us love/a gift from God which helps us to...'