

Mothering Sunday

Introductory activity (optional)

Show some photographs (on the screen or passed around) Make sure some are clear and it is easy to see what is happening and what people are feeling, and some which are not clear at all, maybe faded and old. Discuss with the congregation which pictures are easier to see and relate to than others and why.

Talk

Can you think of something that you have wanted so much that you just cannot stop thinking about it. Perhaps you were hoping for something for Christmas. Perhaps you have desperately wanted your teenager to come home when they have missed their curfew so that you can go to bed and stop worrying. Perhaps you really, really want your parents to give in and get a puppy or a kitten. Perhaps when you wake up on a Monday morning, you really don't want the meeting, presentation or exam you have been dreading, to arrive.

Sometimes we can be really obvious about our longings. Maybe we drop subtle hints whenever there is an advert for what we want on the TV. Maybe our grumpy snapping at people might show that actually we just want to go back to bed and pull the duvet over our head. Sometimes, though our longings are hidden from everybody, perhaps even from ourselves because we don't want to admit our pain and disappointment.

It is very easy to look at other people and see something that we want and don't have. Maybe we look at the single person and wish we had the tranquility of their Sunday morning. Maybe we look at the families and wish we had the love and companionship that they seem to share. Maybe we look at other people's children or parents and wish ours were cooler or better behaved like theirs.

The Bible tells us that God knows all of these thoughts and feelings. Jesus describes himself as the Light of the World. It is easy to think that this is just about sunshiny skies and joy, but it is also about light that exposes. Before digital cameras we used to 'expose' a photograph [*consider having pictures of this process on the screen, or linking it to the photos you showed earlier*]. The exposure to the light bringing out the true picture. Jesus' light reveals everything. It shows our best bits, the bits that we like and are prepared to put on the wall. It shows our worst bits, the ugly bits that we would prepare to hide, but it also shows our attitudes to things that matter to us.

[Ask for eight volunteers to come up to the front and line up facing the congregation in height order – if you are concerned this might take a long time ask some beforehand selecting a good range of heights]

The prophet Samuel was sad that Saul had not turned out to be the king he and the people of Israel had hoped that he would be. God exposed this sadness for what it was, a longing for something that was no longer in God's will, and a fear of what might happen, rather than a hope and obedience to his plan. When he recognized the truth of what God was saying, Samuel set out to Bethlehem to anoint one of Jesse's sons as the new king that God had chosen. We might think that because Samuel was a prophet, a special messenger for God who could hear God speaking to him directly, he would find it easy to make choices that made God happy, but Samuel was just like the rest of us - very good at deciding things about people just because of the way that they look.

When Jesse introduced his first son, Eliab [*move to the tallest person and pretend to judge their height and strength*], Samuel thought that because he was big and strong he was definitely the king

that God had chosen. But God said 'No. He is not the one. You are looking at his outward appearance, but I look at the heart'.

Jesse introduced his second son, Abinadab [*move to the next tallest person and pretend to judge their height and stature*] but God said 'No' [*encourage the congregation to join in with the 'No' as you approach and reject the next five volunteers*]. Jesse had apparently run out of sons, but then they sent for the youngest David who was looking after the sheep and wasn't seen as important enough to meet the prophet. When David arrived God said 'Yes, this is the one. Anoint him as the next king [*place a cardboard crown on your smallest volunteer's head*].

God could see that David's heart was in the right place. He loved God and wanted to do the things that gave God joy and showed other people how amazing he is. Samuel's eyes were open to the possibilities that God is not interested in power or status, or even physical strength or beauty, but what is in their heart - what somebody thinks, says and does [*point to 'David's heart, brain, lips and hands as you say this last sentence*].

David wrote lots of poems called Psalms about his friendship with God, many of which show that being a friend of God is not always easy, and sometimes we can feel like he doesn't understand our longings and is not listening to our thoughts and feelings. On Mothering Sunday we celebrate the gift of God's parent love for us and the people that he gives us to care for and be cared for by. But for many this is a difficult day, filled with pain and longing for loved ones who are not around for all sorts of reasons. David's Psalm 23 reminds us that we can hold on to the truth of God's light in our lives, even when it feels like we are walking in a dark valley.

Read Psalm 23 [if you have somebody who can sign then ask them to sign this as you read]

Prayer idea

Encourage the congregation to join in with the actions as you pray and respond with the refrain 'thank you that your light shines in our life'

Heavenly Father

[hands on heart] Thank you that your light shines in our life. Thank you that you know all the thoughts and feelings that we have. Help us to take comfort in the truth that you know the longings of our hearts even when we might feel like we are all alone and unheard

Thank you that your light shines in our life.

[hands on head] Thank you that your light shines in our life. Thank you that your Holy Spirit helps us to know who you are and how much you love us. Help us to think about ways that we can give you joy and show other people how amazing you are.

Thank you that your light shines in our life.

[hands on lips] Thank you that your light shines in our life. Thank you that we can say things that help other people to know that they are loved and heard. Help us to speak kindly to each other.

Thank you that your light shines in our life.

[hands out in front palm up] Thank you that your light shines in our life. Thank you that we can do things that bring light into other people's lives. Help us to listen to your prompting, like Samuel, and do things that show how much you love them

Thank you that your light shines in our life.