

Well this is a change, me actually writing something instead of just rabbiting on at the front of church. I have to check my spelling and my grammar and everything! By the way I have just found out that grammar is spelt with two 'a's – we learn something new every day.

That is certainly true at the moment. It seems like we get new information on the virus and what we need to do about it almost every couple of hours. I do urge everyone to keep an eye out on the official news outlets. Once again the internet is a source of good and evil and we need to be particularly careful about the information we are responding to and sharing. There is an awful lot of bovine excretion out there.

Some of the information we received this week was the list of those people that the government regard as essential. If you are an essential worker your kids get to go to school (the kids might not be thrilled about that but at least they won't be 'bored' at home). Now I don't think that anyone would disagree with that list – of course emergency workers, supply chain workers etc. are very necessary – and we are, or at least should be, very grateful for all that they do. But have you noticed the overall nature of the people on the list? No! Then allow me to point it out to you – they are all, in some respect, nurturing rolls. Protecting, caring, guiding, cleaning, providing. I could go on but I am sure that you get my drift. It is somehow appropriate that on Mothering Sunday we are, at last, realising the deep intrinsic value of those who care for us – not only on a personal level but on a national level.

One of the purposes of Mothering Sunday is to remind us of how much we owe to our care givers and to prompt us to showing, at least once a year, our gratitude. Back in the olden days (i.e. before I was born) it was about being grateful to Mother Church; then, over the years, it became more about our own mothers and lately those who take on that mothering role. All those who cook, clean, guide, protect, soothe our scraped knees and, yes, discipline us when we step over the line. As children we need all these things and now, finally, we realise we need them as adults too.

So how do we show our gratitude to all these wonderful people? Well our nearest and dearest will probably get a card and possibly some chocolates or some flowers. But a much better way is to relieve them of as much of the burden as possible (cough – kids clean your bedrooms more often – cough) show them that you are grateful for their love and care by loving and caring in turn – very right – very biblical. Now we need to broaden that approach to those who are caring for us during this current situation.

I don't recommend going out and buying your dustbin man, sorry refuse collector, a bunch of flowers, nor should you go and give your local GP a hug (social distancing and all that) but we can all relieve their burden as much as possible. Simple things like; making sure your bin is out when it should be, not shouting at the shop staff just because they have run out of milk (it's not their fault there are some silly, selfish people out there) not bothering our emergency departments with minor injuries

(scraped knees are not A&E issues) and generally not taking our essential workers for granted.

As thinking and caring human beings these should all be obvious, you don't need to be a Christian to show love and compassion to those around you. But as Christians we have an additional calling. We are called to pray. In times like these we can feel helpless and unable to act; part of being church is not just to gather physically but to gather spiritually and join together in prayer for the sake of others.

So my call to you this week is twofold: Remember with thanksgiving all those who care for and nurture us and pray for all who are working through this crisis. Below are some suggestions from the **Mothers' Union web site** but your words are important too – seriously God does not care about correct grammar.

Loving God, we give thanks for all who care for us,
who have encouraged us and helped us grow,
who have forgiven us, and cared for us when we were unwell,
who have supported us when times were hard,
who have challenged us, who have told us about you.
Nurturing God, we give you thanks. Amen

God with a mother's heart,
you gather us as your children.
You comfort and hold us in your warm embrace.
When we hurt your arms enfold us.
When we are afraid your wings protect us.
When we are hungry you feed us with the bread of life.
God with a mother's heart,
your love surrounds and supports us,
in good times and tough,
in the midst of joy and pain,
always and everywhere.
You will never leave nor abandon us.
God eternal and loving one,
God with a mother's heart,
we thank you this day
for being part of your family.

Lord, on this day set aside to honour and remember mothers,
we give you thanks for all our care givers.
Thank you for the sacrifices they made.
We thank you for the people who raised us,
we thank you for those who held us and fed us,
who cared for us and kissed away our pain.
We pray that our lives may reflect the love they showed us.

The following prayer is from 'The Sanctuary' resource site.

Rescuing God, you left the safety and beauty of heaven to come and save us.

You gave your very life to deliver us from death forever, and to bring us into fullness of life.

We thank you for all who take risks and make sacrifices for others in their daily work, and especially for the men and women who work in our emergency services.

Help us to honour and appreciate our police, fire-service and paramedics and to bless them through our interactions with them, our support of those known to us personally, and our prayers for them.

Be with them all today, enabling them to rescue all they seek to help.

Restore a culture of respect and appreciation in our nation, and inspire those who work in our emergency services to excel and care in equal measure. May we be quick to thank and slow to criticise those who risk so much for our safety.

Safeguard and release resources to all areas of our emergency services and lead all those involved in reform – whether in Government or service management – in wisdom, humility and creativity.

We bless our police service to have insight, compassion and breakthrough in resolving crime so that our streets become safe, our young people are empowered and our communities become stronger.

We bless our fire service to experience your protection and to be filled with courage. We bless their equipment to function well and their expertise to combine with your favour, so that fires are brought under control quicker and more effectively than ever.

And we bless our paramedics with clear minds to make quick, accurate decisions, so that through their skills and gentle care, they may bring your healing and comfort to all.

Amen.