

Before this service began, I asked you to log in to the mentimeter platform and enter up to three words that come to mind as we think of the love of mother/mother figures in our lives.

We will now see what has come up

Switch to www.mentimeter.com slide

The size of the print will indicate how many have chosen that particular word. We've got quite a range here. What we see in all these words is love in which nothing is held back; a love that shows itself in so many acts of service, so often taken for granted.

Quite apart from the cooking, cleaning, tidying up – there is the listening ear, the advice, the encouragement, the patience, the understanding – what is coming out here is the spirit in which that is given. As I look at all these words, a word that comes to my mind is graciousness.

I remember one night when our eldest lad was around 4 or 5, we were putting him to bed. He asked us, 'Mummy, Daddy, do you love me this much?' and the hands were held slightly apart. We assured him we did. Then the question was repeated with the hands held further and further apart until the hands were at full stretch. I'm left with a picture of love at full stretch.

As we look at this group of words on the screen, let's put 'love at full stretch' alongside that word 'graciousness'

Let's now take a look at our reading. I want to focus on

¹³Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. That was a love in which nothing was held back; that was love at full stretch, culminating in arms stretched out on a cross.

You know when you are writing a letter or an essay, you often find yourself looking for the right word to use. Paul is doing that in his writing. There are several words in Greek (Paul was writing in Greek) that we translate as forgive. Some are very legal, talking of penalties laid aside. The word Paul is using in this part of his letter is different, it has the element of graciousness.

This is the love that we are called to share in the world in which we live, generously, graciously. Looking back on life, the home is probably the first place we experienced unconditional love. We were loved, we are loved simply because we are who we are. We don't always deserve it; we are sometimes ungrateful; we sometimes hurt the one who loves us – but we continue to be loved. And we love in return, sometimes it's an awkward, teenage, self-conscious love. But it is love.

The Bible often uses the illustration of the love of parent, of mother, of father to give us an insight into the love of God for us. So many of the words that are

coming up on our screen also speak of the gracious, self-giving, self-emptying love of God for us in Christ.

So today we give thanks to God for the love we received in our homes, love that we learned to share. We give thanks for that love that we have known in Christ, that we seek to share in thought and word and deed in the world of today.