



The United Reformed Church in Lion Walk
Christ Church United Reformed Church
The United Reformed Church at Chappel

Sunday 22nd March 2020

Call to Worship: God, we remember that your spirit is reaching everywhere.
It rejoices in the wonder and beauty of creation.
Your spirit is near to all that is wounded or weighed down
It gathers in the sick, the lost, and the lonely.
Your spirit creates and recreates a vision of hope.
Let our worship rejoice in your work of renewal and transformation.

A Prayer by Jan Berry:

God our refuge, we seek your protection.
Protect the vulnerable from illness:
those who are old and frail, weakened by years and struggle;
those who care for others, expending energy and love;
those for whom inability to work means hardship and poverty.
Protect us from the greed and suspicion which snatches at our own security;
stock-piling and panic-buying that deprives others of the necessities of life.
Protect us from the shortsightedness which sees the germ in our own eyes
and ignores the plagues of hunger, war and violence that take so many lives each day.
Protect us from the isolation that leads to loneliness and despair,
denying the interconnectedness that links us with one another.
God our refuge, in our panic and fear may we not lose sight of our common humanity
that makes us one people in you.

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy Kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory for ever. Amen

Reading - Psalm 23 (NRSV):

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

Reflection:

Psalm 23 is the chosen Psalm for today, the fourth Sunday of Lent, but in these difficult days we seem far from its metaphorical green pastures and still waters. This is a dark valley we're in. For some it may be the darkest valley of all.

When we ourselves are anxious and fearful, we can't help but marvel at the strong faith of the Psalmist who, even when faced with the threat of 'Deep Darkness', can proclaim that there is nothing to fear, for the Lord's comfort, goodness and mercy are a lifelong presence.

A marvellously strong faith, but not a unique one. In the past week I have spoken to many people whose determination to overcome the shadow of coronavirus speaks of a faith equally firm. We may not yet know what the future holds for us and our society, but we know that the love of God revealed in the compassion of Jesus and sustained by the Holy Spirit is real and active in the world today. In Psalm 23 we have a statement of the faith that the love of God is with us in good times and in bad, and that this dark valley in which we find ourselves is *not* our final destination; we walk *through* it sustained by God's love.

And that love comes to us through the care, concern and compassion we receive from others – and offer to others. And we shall dwell in the house of the Lord our whole life long.

Prayer:

Please keep a few minutes of silence, bringing to mind all those known to you who are especially vulnerable at this time, praying for their safety and health....

God of compassion,
be close to those who are ill, afraid or in isolation.
In their loneliness, be their consolation;
in their anxiety, be their hope;
in their darkness, be their light;
through him who suffered alone on the cross,
but reigns with you in glory,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

Lord Jesus,
In the midst of a storm,
You said, 'Peace be still.'
Bid our anxious fears subside,
Sustain your church in faith, hope and love,
Bring our world through this tumult,
Grant wisdom to those with heavy responsibilities,
And healing and hope to those who are infected.

Spirit of healing and hope,
give skill, sympathy and resilience
to all who are caring for the sick,
and your wisdom to those searching for a cure.
Strengthen them,
that through their work health and strength may be restored;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

In all the paths we walk
may God hold us steady and close.
May Christ Jesus bless us and every place we enter.
And may the Spirit give us length of days and fullness of life.