



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

Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2020

Call to Worship:

We will praise the Lord, because of his goodness  
**We will praise the Lord, because of his love,**  
We will tell of all he has done here among us,  
**We will tell of his grace in the heavens above.**  
Yet we will not forget what the Lord is desiring,  
**For he loves us no matter how badly we live,**  
And he calls us to leave behind all of our idols,  
**To strive to be those that he calls us to be.**

Prayer/Meditation:

The church is not a place; it is a people.

The church is not only a steeple above the treeline, streets, and cars.  
Rather, it is a people proclaiming to the world that  
we are here for the work of healing and of justice.

The church is not walls built stone upon stone, held together by mortar  
but rather person, linked with person, linked with person:  
all ages and genders and abilities—  
a community built on the foundation of reason, faith, and love.

The church is not a set of doors open on Sunday morning,  
but the commitment day after day, and moment after moment,  
of our hearts throwing open the doors of welcome  
to the possibility of new experience and radical compassion.

The church is not simply a building, a steeple, a pew.  
The church is the gathering together of all the people, and experiences,  
and fear, and love, and hope in our resilient hearts;  
gathering, however we can, to say to the world:  
welcome, come in, lay down your heartache, and pick up hope and love.  
For the church is us—each and every one of us—together,  
a beacon of hope to this world that so sorely needs it.

We come to church now, in our homes,  
seeking your Spirit, seeking your love and offering our prayer:

Loving God,  
you know that we are hungry for many things,  
acceptance and recognition,  
meaning and purpose,  
a sign that we are valuable.  
We are hungry for love.

It is so easy to fill ourselves with other things,  
to pursue the love of money,  
to follow vain desires.

In a world of great inequality,  
where Lazarus still begs at the rich man's gate,  
give us thankful acceptance of the gift of life,  
and recognition of the common wealth of sharing.

Teach us the meaning of contentment with enough  
and a purpose not in our own needs alone  
but in the needs of others.

You have given us such worth;  
fill us with your love,  
show us what really satisfies.

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: Phillipians 2:1-13

Hymn 56:

Creating God, your fingers trace  
the bold designs of farthest space;  
let sun and moon and stars and light  
and what lies hidden praise your might.

Sustaining God, your hands uphold  
earth's myst'ries known or yet untold;  
let water's fragile blend with air,  
enabling life, proclaim your care.

Redeeming God, your arms embrace  
all now despised for creed or race;  
let peace, descending like a dove,  
make known on earth your healing love.

Indwelling God, your gospel claims  
one family with a billion names;  
let every life be touched by grace  
until we praise you face to face.

Reading: Matthew 5:1-16

## Reflection:

Throughout the New Testament, there is a strong theme of Life. Jesus teaching was about the Kingdom of God, and we sometimes interpret this phrase as having something to do with a life beyond this one, where things will all be new and different, and all the trials and strains of life on earth will be gone. But there is plentiful evidence in the New Testament that the intention of Jesus was to establish this new world not at some vague unspecified time in the future, but here and then. He taught his friends to pray the words, 'your Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven' - suggesting that the time and the place for the Kingdom of God was here and now. We still use that prayer in church today, and we still believe that our calling is to change the world.

And what is this new world to be like, and how is it to be achieved? Well, first of all it is abundantly clear that the new world, the Kingdom, is open to all people. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians says: 'In Jesus Christ you are all children of God... there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Jesus Christ. Paul takes what we might today describe as contrasting demographic groups, and suggests that in the Kingdom of God there is no difference between them. We could do the same today with our contemporary demographic groups - nationalities, cultures, ethnicities, even faiths, and say that, for all the differences, we are 'one race - the human race'.

And this brings us to one of the most difficult parts of the Christian faith, the question of being committed to people we don't know.

The challenge is to express the same concern and show the same love and make similar sacrifices on behalf of the world's poorest and most needy. As always Jesus is our example. Paul, in the well-known hymn from the letter to the Phillipians from which we read this morning describes Jesus as having emptied himself for the sake of the Kingdom of God, and suggests that this should be an example for all his followers: 'do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit' he says, 'but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.'

Sometimes we can be a little bit cynical when we see on television news reports of natural disaster, hurricane, drought, famine, poverty, starvation, thousands of displaced hungry people with nowhere to go and nothing to eat for whatever reason. We see images of starving children; homeless, hopeless victims of natural disaster; refugee families abandoned and unwanted with no shelter but a blanket and nowhere to go because nobody wants them. And we may sometimes think that the news crews are being sensationalist and deliberately playing on our emotions. That may or may not be the case, but it does not alter the truth of what they are reporting.

But what do we think when we see such people? Are they foreigners in a foreign land just having to cope with the circumstances they were born into? Is it just a dreadful piece of bad luck for them? Are they separated from us not just by distance, but by a cultural barrier that prevents us from seeing that they are really our family, suffering and starving? Are they people for whom we can take Paul's advice, and think of them as better than ourselves?

From the gospel according to Matthew we read the beatitudes, Jesus' manifesto for the Kingdom of God. Blessings abound here, and they are not for the comfortable, the complacent, the confident, the powerful, the influential, the arrogant, the satisfied or the self-assured. Blessings abound, and they are for the poor in spirit, the mourning, the meek, the hungry and thirsty for righteousness, the pure, the peaceful, the persecuted.

Between them , the words of Jesus in the beatitudes and the words of Paul in his letter to the Philippians point us to way of life that goes very much against our human instinct of looking after ourselves, often to the exclusion of others in need:

‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

It may be a blunt thing to say, and a very hard thing to accept for all of us, but if the words of the New Testament are true then it must be part of our Christian life to be committed not just to ourselves and our immediate families, but to our larger family, and to ask ourselves what we are doing for the cause of justice and the life of the Kingdom of God when we have so much and others have so little.

Prayer:

Gracious God:

We are the church united as we pray from different locations,  
connected through something more marvellous than technology--  
your Spirit filling us with hope and vision.

We come first of all with thanksgiving.

Thank you for the many kindnesses we have experienced  
in this time of social distancing: old friends reconnecting,  
some households learning about togetherness,  
others learning new quieter rhythms.

Thank you for the joy of food and the beauty of music.

Even as there is much to be thankful for,  
we come together with lament;  
this virus has caused so much loss of life around the world.

So many suffer, so many families grieve,  
and we don’t know when it will end.

We lament the financial burdens of this pandemic,  
and that it has fallen heavily on the poorest,  
with inequalities standing out more sharply than usual.

We know that racism is one of the roots of injustice,  
and that discrimination, violence and even death

blight the lives of minorities every day.  
There are those among us who suffer because of racism,  
and there are those among us who haven't thought about racism  
because it is the privileged air we breathe.  
As we work on solving health problems,  
help us build a society that addresses injustice.

We continue to pray for a vaccine for this virus.  
Give insight to researchers, and co-operation among nations,  
so that all can benefit from scientific breakthroughs.  
Give wisdom to our politicians making difficult decisions  
about how and when to modify social distancing.  
Help them find that fine balance between opening our economy  
and safeguarding public health.

Keep us healthy and help us care for each other.  
As we all make choices about who to see,  
and how many we should see at a time,  
help us refrain from judging each other,  
just as we do not want to be judged by others.

Jesus, walk with us this week.  
We trust in you, because you have been with us,  
showing us the faithful path in good times and bad,  
and you will be with us, come what may. Amen

Hymn 621:

Almighty Father, who for us thy Son didst give,  
that all the nations through his precious death might live,  
in mercy guard us, lest by sloth and selfish pride  
we cause to stumble those for whom the Saviour died.

We are thy stewards; thine our talents, wisdom, skill;  
our only glory that we may thy trust fulfil;  
that we thy pleasure in our neighbours' good pursue,  
if thou but workest in us both to will and do.

On just and unjust thou thy care dost freely shower;  
make us, thy children, free from greed and lust for power,  
lest human justice, yoked with our unequal laws,  
oppress the needy and neglect the humble cause.

Let not thy worship blind us to the claims of love;  
but let thy manna lead us to the feast above,  
to seek the country which by faith we now possess,  
where Christ, our treasure, reigns in peace and righteousness.

Benediction

God is our light, our hope, our all in all:  
**Blessed be God, now and forever!**

Christ is our home, our life, our joy:  
**Blessed be God, now and forever!**

Our worship concludes; our service continues.  
**Blessed be God, now and forever!**

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us, and with all those we love, today and always, Amen.