



The  
United  
Reformed  
Church

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

Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2020

Call to Worship:

At this time of worship  
**may the peace of God enfold us;**  
In these days of fear and anxiety  
**may the peace of Christ inspire us;**  
In this world of suffering and pain  
**may the peace of the Spirit comfort us.**

Prayer/Meditation:

We worship today as the Church, scattered through town and village yet together and unite in worship, drawn together by our faith in Christ and by our sense of call to ministry and service, here to spend this time together in union with Christians all over the world to share our thoughts, concerns and visions.

We worship today as individuals, each unique and with our own God-given gifts, each with our own worries and concerns, each with our own ambitions and priorities; here to share our faith with others, to seek confidence and assurance, to seek answers to our own questions and resolution of our own problems.

We worship today as part of the human family, thankful for the provision that gives us a comfortable life, yet guilty and concerned that our comfort may be at the expense of others, here to seek justice, reconciliation and truth, and to dedicate ourselves again to the hope of a new world in which everyone is cared for.

We worship today as children of God, aware of the power and presence of God in our lives, yet sometimes overwhelmed by the mystery of God, here to explore that mystery and to encourage and support one another in proclaiming a faith of which we may be unsure and a belief of which we may be doubtful.

We worship today as disciples of Christ because, uncertain though we may be of our faith, we are convinced of the truth of the Gospel of Jesus and because we share his vision of a new kingdom, a different world where the weakness and evil of this world is overcome.

We worship today as community; for although we are kept apart by the threat of sickness and infection, we are bound together in mutual love and care, together as a family to support one another in our life of faith; a family spending this time together at home, preparing ourselves through worship and prayer to journey through another week of ministry and witness.

And as we bond in a common faith and a common purpose with Christians all over the world, so we join to the prayer taught by Jesus to his friends:

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: Exodus 17:1-7

Hymn 71:

O God of Bethel, by whose hand  
thy people still are fed,  
who through this weary pilgrimage  
hast all our fathers led:

Our vows, our prayers, we now present  
before thy throne of grace;  
God of the ages, be the God  
of each succeeding race.

Through each perplexing path of life  
our wandering footsteps guide;  
give us each day our daily bread,  
and raiment fit provide.

O spread thy covering wings around  
till all our wanderings cease,  
and at our Father's loved abode  
our souls arrive in peace.

Reading: Matthew 21:23-32

Reflection:

The Israelites had made their dramatic escape from Egypt, led by Moses. They had crossed the Red Sea or the Sea of Reeds, depending on which translation you favour, and the pursuing Egyptians had all been drowned. So the Israelites, on reaching the safety of the other side, had paused to sing a song proclaiming the greatness and might of their God who had delivered them. Then they set off into the wilderness until they came to a place they called Marah, meaning 'bitterness', because the water they found there was too bitter for them to drink and Moses, under God's guidance, found a way of making the water drinkable. And they came to Elim, where there was plenty of water, and they rested there a while.

Then they moved on again, and they became so hungry that they began to wish they had stayed in Egypt, and Moses again consulted God, and there was a miraculous provision of food which tasted like wafers made with honey - which sounds quite nice - but they ended up eating it for the next forty years.

Then they came to the episode we read this morning, in which they were once again thirsty, and Moses once again went to God, this time with more than a little frustration, saying, 'What am I going to do with these people, they are about ready to stone me', and God once again showed him how to provide what the people needed. And there ends the first phase of the Israelites' wanderings as they then go into battle with the Amalekites

During these first few months of the Exodus, it's easy to understand how Moses could have become so frustrated. The people seemed to do nothing but complain the whole time. First they were thirsty, then they were hungry, then they were thirsty again, and each time they accused Moses of taking them away from a hard but secure life of enslavement in which they may not have had much of a life and were allowed no sense of community or nation at all, but at least they were fed and watered. Now Moses was taking them on this precarious journey into the unknown in which they never seemed to know from one day to the next whether they were going to live or die. And while Moses may have grown tired of their complaining, it seemed that shouting about their difficulties was the only way to get what they needed. Only after they complained about the bitterness of the water was it made fit to drink; only after they had accused Moses of bringing them into the wilderness to starve did food become available for them every day; and only when they accused Moses of driving them into the desert to die of thirst was more water provided. It may have been Moses' view of the situation - and that of the writers of the book of Exodus - that the Israelites were being a quarrelsome people whose faith in God was weak so that they felt they had to test God all the time by their demands and complaints - but it could equally well be said that their complaining was the only way they could get the food and water they needed to keep them alive. You might wonder if God had properly thought through this great adventure. The people evidently wondered about that. Here was Moses, God's mouthpiece and their leader, dragging them from pillar to post on a grand scheme of escape and resettlement, leading them, it would later transpire, into fierce military campaigns for which they were untrained and unprepared, and all the while urging them to rely completely on a God who was a very poor quartermaster and was frequently late with the rations. It's small wonder they complained and small wonder they asked, 'Is the Lord among us or not?'

That's an interesting question which reveals where the Israelites' priorities lay and perhaps explains why they had such a tense relationship with Moses. It is also a question we are asking today as we struggle to come to terms with new and difficult circumstances in our own world. 'Is the Lord among us or not?'

Like Moses, the Church believes its calling is to offer God's freedom and deliverance to the world; the Church believes that in the Christian gospel there is the potential to change everything; the Church believes that in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth there is to be found something unique, something so momentous that it is difficult to grasp or explain, but that his Spirit is somehow alive and active in the world and is able to bring about astonishing changes in people's lives and in the lives of whole societies - indeed in the life of the whole world; the Church believes that peace, justice, love, wholeness, forgiveness - all practised and proclaimed by Jesus - are all things of God, and calls upon the world to embrace them and to embrace God, so that the whole human race might come to a promised land. That is the church's mission, the church's certainty, the church's faith.

But remember the Israelites. All they wanted was something to eat and something to drink.

There are echoes of this too in the reading from Matthew this morning, in Jesus' little parable about the father who asked his two sons to go and work in the vineyards. One said he wasn't going, but did: the other said he was going, but didn't. Having established that it was the son who went who did the father's will, regardless of what he said about it, Jesus said: 'the prostitutes and tax collectors are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you'. This parable points up the same contrast between the faith and piety, and the down-to-earth business of doing what needs to be done.

Yes, it is the church's mission to see the big picture, to speak of peace, justice, wholeness, forgiveness, love, inclusiveness, tolerance and respect, to believe in God and to journey together to our promised land - the kingdom of God. As Moses mission was to the Israelites, so ours is to the world. But just as the Israelites needed more than just the *promise* of milk and honey, so there are many in our world whose need is not just for the *promise* of the Kingdom. Like the people of Israel, they are asking 'is the Lord with us or not?', because all they want is something to eat and something to drink.

Prayer:

Jesus said that those who mourn shall be comforted. We offer our prayers now for ourselves and others, remembering especially those who are in any kind of trouble or distress - of whom there are so many. Our world seems filled with pain, need and sorrow; the same world that Jesus came to transform, a world that he cared for so deeply that he gave his life for it.

We bring to mind the causes of so much suffering - the greed that denies the many their share of the earth's riches to the benefit of the few; the waste that wantonly squanders the world's God-given resources without thought for the future; the intolerance that divides families, communities and nations through a refusal to speak to or even acknowledge people of different opinions, nationalities or faiths.; the pride that tempts us to think too highly of ourselves and too poorly of others; the indifference, that cares too little about God, too little about anything.

We pray for those who pay the price of human folly - the poor and the hungry, the homeless and dispossessed, victims of war and violence, crime and cruelty; the distressed, isolated, crushed and forgotten, all who are deprived of love and denied hope.

We pray for places we have been or places we have heard of, people we have met and people we have only read about, situations we have experienced and circumstances we can barely relate to, seeking the blessing of God and the presence of the Spirit for the life of the world ....

And as we think of the whole world, so we think to of people and situations close to home, as we remember those whom we love, recalling their hopes and dreams, their worries and concerns; giving thanks for all they mean to us, naming them in our hearts....

And finally we pray for the family of the church, giving thanks for our place in it and for the influence it is able to bring to bear on the life of the world. May we be encouraged always to play our part in the church's life, that we, in our own way, however small that may be, may make our contribution to the life of the kingdom to which Jesus calls us. In his name Amen

Hymn 549

One more step along the world I go,  
one more step along the world I go;  
from the old things to the new  
keep me travelling along with you:  
*And it's from the old I travel to the new;  
keep me travelling along with you.*

Round the corner of the world I turn,  
more and more about the world I learn;  
all the new things that I see  
you'll be looking at along with me:

*And it's from the old I travel to the new;  
keep me travelling along with you.*

As I travel through the bad and good,  
keep me travelling the way I should;  
where I see no way to go  
you'll be telling me the way, I know:  
*And it's from the old I travel to the new;  
keep me travelling along with you.*

Give me courage when the world is rough,  
keep me loving though the world is tough;  
leap and sing in all I do,  
keep me travelling along with you:  
*And it's from the old I travel to the new;  
keep me travelling along with you.*

You are older than the world can be,  
you are younger than the life in me;  
ever old and ever new,  
keep me travelling along with you:  
*And it's from the old I travel to the new;  
keep me travelling along with you.*

Benediction

Let us go now in peace,  
for Christ has called us to live in peace  
among our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Let us go now in courage,  
for Christ has called us from the places of our life  
to be agents of transformation and partners in healing.

Let us go now in joy and thanksgiving,  
for Christ is our light!

Let us go now as one body,  
to love and serve God as we love and serve the world!

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.