



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

Sunday 6th September 2020

Call to Worship:

God among us,
we gather in the name of Jesus
to learn love for one another.
Turn our feet from selfish paths,
our hands from shameful deeds,
our minds to your wisdom,
and our hearts to your grace.

Prayer:

Loving God,
You call us to turn away from behaviours and attitudes that belong to the darkness,
to live honest and transparent lives as children of the light.
We confess the times when we have failed,
giving in to our darker thoughts and desires;
and acting in ways that did not bring honour to Your name.

Lord, in Your mercy, **forgive us.**
Teach us how to live as children of the light.

You call us love one another,
to put the needs and interests of those around us above our own;
to love others as deeply as we have been loved by You.
We confess the times when we have failed,
allowing our own desires and interests to take precedence
over the needs of others.

Lord, in Your mercy, **forgive us.**
Teach us how to love as we have been loved.

You call us to deal honourably with one another,
even those who have hurt or offended us;
to work through our disagreements with love and integrity,
and so to build up the Body of Christ.
We confess the times when we have failed,
finding it easier to simply walk away from hurtful relationships,
or to talk behind people's backs rather than to their faces.

Lord, in Your mercy, **forgive us.**
Teach us how to live with love and integrity.

Give us hunger to know You more,
so that we may do Your will
and walk in Your ways,
to the glory of Your name. **Amen.**

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: Romans 13:8-14

Hymn 79

This day God gives me strength of high heaven,
sun and moon shining, flame in my hearth;
flashing of lightning, wind in its swiftness,
deeps of the ocean, firmness of earth.

This day God sends me strength to sustain me,
might to uphold me, wisdom as guide.
Your eyes are watchful, your ears are listening,
your lips are speaking, Friend at my side.

God's way is my way, God's love surrounds me,
God's host defends me, saving from ill;
angels of heaven, drive from me always
all that would harm me, stand by me still,

Rising I thank you, mighty and strong one,
King of creation, giver of rest,
firmly confessing Threeness of Persons,
Oneness of Godhead, Trinity blest.

Reading: Matthew 18:15-20

Reflection:

You have to be very careful with bits of the bible like those we have heard today. Matthew tells of Jesus giving quite clear instructions about how to deal with disputes and disagreements in the community. It sounds almost like the kind of procedure that your employer's human resources department would use to settle a grievance, and it's all too tempting to think of it as a rule to be obeyed. That's the trouble, really, when we address just a few verses of scripture in our services of worship. We take our lesson for the day from one tiny extract of the gospel, and can easily forget the 99.9 percent of it that we haven't read today. In today's reading, Jesus outlines a resolution process, but in next week's reading, only a few verses further on in Matthew, Jesus advocates unlimited forgiveness. The two are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but we are warned at least not to build the pillars of our belief on the foundation of a single verse of scripture.

This is perhaps akin to the question we find Paul struggling with in his letter to the Romans. Paul had quite a bit of trouble in reconciling Law and Love, and in various of his letters he engages in some quite tortured theological acrobatics to explain why Law is both unnecessary yet vitally important. His conclusion, which is also the teaching of Jesus we find in the gospels, is that law is fulfilled by love. All these laws, Paul says, 'do not murder, steal, commit adultery, covet', and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' This of course reflects what Matthew reports Jesus saying: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'

As we come now to celebrate together the sacrament of Holy Communion, we do so not in obedience to law, not out of fear of punishment or hope of reward but - we hope and pray - out of love for God and our fellow humans, and out of desire to walk in the way of Jesus, and serve the kingdom of God.

Communion:

Jesus shared meals in all kinds of homes:

The home of Zacchaeus
a collaborator and a crook.

The home of Simon, a Pharisee
where he defended the woman
who caused a scene at the dinner party

The home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus,
his friends,
a house where he could laugh and relax.

We're used to sharing this meal
in grander buildings,
spaces set-apart as sacred.

But this is where it all began:
in ordinary houses.
In upstairs rooms and wayside inns
and around kitchen tables.

In the spaces where people live,
surrounded by the ordinary clutter of living.

Come, living Jesus, be our guest
here in our homes.
Come, living Jesus, be our host
here at your table.

We praise and thank you, Eternal One,
Love that will not be contained.
For you created the earth:

it's beauty, its detail, its delicate balance.
And you created us, women and men,
to tend and protect and delight in it.

And when we forgot our beginnings,
neglected our purpose and lost our way,
you sent prophets to call us back
and laws to illumine our path
and finally came yourself
to show us how to live
and to demonstrate the magnitude
of your love for us.

Love that will not be contained.
Love that will not give up on us.
Love that will journey into the darkest places,
even the grave,
to find us.

And so, we lift our voices
to join with nature's song
and the great chorus of witnesses
on earth and in heaven:
Holy, holy, holy,
Love that will not be contained,
heaven and earth are filled with your glory,
Hosanna in the highest!

Blessed is the one who is risen
Hosanna in the highest!

Let's hear, again, the story of Jesus' supper with his disciples on the night before he died, as it's
been recorded by the writer of the Gospel of Matthew:

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread,
and after blessing it he broke it,
gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.'
Then he took a cup,
and after giving thanks he gave it to them,
saying, 'Drink from it, all of you;
for this is my blood of the covenant,
which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

And so we pray...
Come, Holy Spirit
pour out your blessing on our bread and wine
and on us, your gathered people.

We don't need an altar,

a silver chalice or starched table linen.
It's your presence
that makes these ordinary things holy.
Amen.

Here is bread:
broken, as the body of Christ was broken
broken, as the heart of God was broken
broken, as the seal of the tomb was broken
broken to make us whole.

The body of Christ, broken for us. [*we eat the bread*]

Here is the cup:
a cup that brings us together, even in our social distancing
a cup of forgiveness and blessing.

The blood of Christ, poured out for us. [*we drink the wine*]

Prayer:

Vulnerable God,
broken and poured out
to give us life:
May we go from your table
with full hearts.
Ready to be vulnerable,
broken and poured out,
to share your love
with a hungry world.

God,
just as You rescued the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt,
setting them free to worship and serve You,
so you have also rescued us,
setting us free from slavery to selfishness and greed,
and inviting us into relationship with you and one another.
We praise you for the love and mercy you have shown toward us.

You call us to love and serve you
by loving and serving our brothers and sisters, near and far;
to put their needs and interests ahead of our own,
and so to fulfill your law of love.
And so we offer our prayers for the world you created,

We pray for those who do not have what they need in order to survive;
those without enough food and water,
medical care, shelter, or security.
Open our hearts to see the needs in our world,
and to respond with your love.

We pray for those who are living with serious illness or injury,
who face each day with uncertainty or pain,
who find themselves wondering what the future holds.
Open our hearts to see the needs of those around us,
and to respond with your love.

We also pray for your church, the Body of Christ on earth.
We pray that we would be a living example of your love in our world,
treating one another with compassion and respect,
settling differences with love and integrity,
bound together by our common allegiance to You.
Open our hearts to see one another,
and to respond with your love.

We praise you for the way of love shown to us by Jesus Christ.
Open our hearts and lives to your ongoing presence among us,
so that we would grow in faithfulness and love,
and bring honour to your name. Amen.

Hymn 543

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
for we have no help but thee;
yet possessing every blessing,
if our God our Father be.

Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us:
all our weakness thou dost know;
thou didst tread this earth before us,
thou didst feel its keenest woe;
lone and dreary, faint and weary,
through the desert thou didst go.

Spirit of our God, descending,
fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
love with every passion blending,
pleasure that can never cloy:
thus provided, pardoned, guided,
nothing can our peace destroy.

Benediction:

May our Lord Jesus Christ
who has loved us
and given us unending encouragement

and unfailing hope,
inspire us with courage and confidence
in every good thing we say or do.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with each one of us and with all those we love, today and for ever more. AMEN