



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

Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> November 2020

Call to Worship:

We are called from the ends of the earth,  
**we are called from the centre of our lives.**

Men and women, young and old,  
**rich and poor, strong and weak.**

We are called into God's love  
**to yearn for justice and to pray for peace.**

Prayer:

Whispering God,  
the noise of the world is loud.

**Open our ears to your still, small, voice.**

God of revelation,  
the darkness of the world threatens.

**Open our eyes to the light of your presence.**

God of abundance,  
we cling tightly to so many things.

**Open our hands in generosity and joy.**

God of all people,  
we feel the fear of those who are "other."

**Open our arms to the stranger and the enemy.**

God of mystery,  
we want so desperately to understand you.

**Open our minds to the depths of your truth.**

Creating God,  
we long to know your presence.

**Open our hearts to receive your love.**

Still Speaking God,  
throughout history and the wide world  
you have gathered people around your Word  
to instruct and inspire.

We give thanks for all  
who have received your vision  
and shaped diverse and faithful communities  
to follow in your Way.

Continue to open that vision to us,  
that we may become transformed  
by the renewing of your Word in our hearts.  
Enable us to grow in love and understanding for each other .  
Create in us, O God, clean hearts and minds;

Let us join with you in your suffering and your triumph.  
We desire to be your children and  
we claim these blessings in your name.

God who is One, You call us to be one,  
**May we be one with all who are made in Your image.**  
God who is Three, You call us to be community,  
**May we find community with all who are called by Your name.**  
God who calls us all by Your name,  
**May we find our place in Your eternal family.**

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: Matthew 6:7-15

Hymn 387

Great Shepherd of thy people, hear;  
Thy presence now display;  
As thou hast given a place for prayer,  
So give us hearts to pray.

Within these walls let holy peace,  
And love and concord dwell;  
Here give the troubled conscience ease,  
The wounded spirit heal.

May we in faith receive thy word,  
In faith present our prayers;  
And in the presence of our Lord  
Unburden all our cares.

The feeling heart, the seeing eye,  
The humble mind bestow;  
And shine upon us from on high,  
That we in grace may grow.

Reading: Luke 11:1-4

Reflection:

Luke 11:1-4; Matthew 6:7-15

Jesus taught his followers in Aramaic, a dialect of Hebrew. His words were then translated by the evangelists into Greek. The Greek was then translated into English to produce the texts we use today. Given that Jesus words have undergone two translations, and that texts have been copied by hand over centuries, with all the potential for error that entails, we can

see the potential for the distortion of Jesus' original words quite easily. Indeed, we can see that distortion quite clearly in the gospels themselves. We read today both versions of the Lord's Prayer, Matthew's and Luke's. In many English Bibles they are slightly different. In some translations, Jesus says 'Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors'; in others, Jesus says 'Forgive us our *debts* for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us', and in others, Jesus says, 'Forgive us our sins.' One uses *debts*, the other uses *sins* or *trespasses*. This is not just a feature of the English translation; the Greek from which it comes is also different. This is not because Jesus gave different versions of the Lord's Prayer at different times, but because Matthew and Luke, faced with writing their own versions, used words which they believed to be the closest to those which Jesus had spoken, and which were most understandable by the people who would be reading their gospels.

It seems a little odd, perhaps, that three words with meanings so different as debts, trespasses and sins, are still currently in general use in worship. Most churches in this country seem to use the 'trespasses' version, but if you visit any reformed church in Scotland, you will use the 'debts' version, while the 'sins' version is common in more modern translations of the Lord's Prayer, used more and more widely in churches of all denominations.

Debts, of course, are not sinful; they are something outstanding - often money - owed to someone. But in the context of the Lord's Prayer we are talking about debts to God, and this puts us in the arena of debts that are unpayable, like the debts of Third World Nations to the West. Just as we campaign to have the governments of the West forgive the unpayable debts of the poorest nations, so we pray in the Lord's Prayer that the unpayable debt of God's love and goodness be forgiven us, for we too are unable to pay.

The Greek word for 'trespass' has the connotation of stumbling or blundering or making a mistake. It is about falling short or failing to live up to expectation. And it is for those things too that we seek forgiveness. Our lives as Christians both in worship and in our daily lives in a secular society are a pilgrimage of exploration, of seeking insights and truths into what it means to be a community of faith. Inevitably we will from time to time take a wrong direction, blunder off the wrong way or fail to live up to our own standards. For those trespasses we seek forgiveness.

We may note that neither of the two words 'debt' and 'trespass' give much of a hint of wilful wrongdoing, though 'trespass' may come closest. The Lord's Prayer in its earliest version, Matthew's, would seem to acknowledge that much of what we need forgiving for is outwith our direct control. We are indebted to God for all we have and all we are, yet we still keep making mistakes.

Of course we do seek forgiveness too for those things we deliberately do wrong, or neglect to do - for our 'sins'. But it would seem to be in the spirit of the Lord's Prayer not to over-emphasise the word 'sins' and thus obscure the image of a people acknowledging their debt and doing their best to serve a God whose love overlooks the debt and forgives the mistakes.

But there's a word of warning about forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer. 'Forgive us our trespasses *as we forgive those who trespass against us.*' Elsewhere in the gospel, Jesus has a conversation with Peter in which he suggests that Peter's forgiveness of anyone who wrongs him should be effectively limitless - seventy times seven. Here in the Lord's Prayer, he is showing the practical application of that.

It might seem at first sight that the implication is that God will only forgive us as much as we forgive others, but that would seem to go against everything else Jesus says about God. Stories like the parable of the Prodigal Son, the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin seem to suggest that God's love and forgiveness are not conditional and that God's love is so great that we can

be forgiven from anything regardless of how we offer forgiveness to others. So Jesus probably isn't saying that we can only be forgiven if we forgive.

He is perhaps saying that we are entitled to ask only for the same forgiveness that we are prepared to offer to others. So the Lord's Prayer suddenly becomes more than just a prayer but a challenge as well. Not just instruction on how to pray, but a lesson in life. For now, every time the disciples are called upon to forgive, every time they have the decision to make of whether to forgive or to seek revenge or punishment, they have this lesson at the back of their minds: *'Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.'*

Someone insults them, steals from them, hurts them in some way. They can call for punishment - for the justice of the world - or they can think to themselves. How can I ask God's forgiveness for my mistakes when I cannot myself forgive this?

I'm sure we can all recall times when we have failed to forgive when we should, when we have held a grudge rather than offering a fresh start. We can all think of people who have upset or offended us over the years and whom we have found it very difficult or even impossible to forgive. Jesus' question comes to each of us: can we reasonably seek forgiveness for our faults if we have ourselves refused forgiveness?

Sometimes we might feel that the answer can be yes. We may feel that we have been justified in withholding our forgiveness because a crime or wrongdoing committed against us has been greater than we would ever inflict on someone else. We might feel comfortable seeking forgiveness for ourselves while refusing it to someone else. That is a decision we make for ourselves. But the challenge posed by the Lord's Prayer nonetheless confronts us every day in our dealings with other people. To seek to be forgiven as we forgive; to be accepted as we accept others; to be loved as we love.

Hymn 473

*God is love, and where true love is, God himself is there.*

Here is Christ we gather, love of Christ our calling.

Christ, our love, is with us, gladness be his greeting.

Let us love and serve him, God of all the ages.

Let us love sincerely, seeing Christ in others.

*God is love, and where true love is, God himself is there.*

When we Christians gather, members of his Body.

Christ, our head, is with us, loving and beloved

Here is sent the Spirit, one with Son and Father,

fire of love's indwelling, bond of peace among us.

*God is love, and where true love is, God himself is there.*

Grant us love's fulfillment, joy with all the blessed,

when we see your glory, risen Lord and Saviour.

Bathe us in your splendour, Light of all creation.

be our bliss for ever, as we sing your praises.

*God is love, and where true love is, God himself is there.*

Communion:

This is the joyful feast of unity.  
Christ has gathered his people around the earth  
to commune at this table.

Across political lines and economic lines,  
in places of powerfully protected affluence,  
and among the poorest of the poor,  
we share a meal,  
remembering and celebrating the One who proved shalom possible.

And so, we come:  
from the East and from the West,  
from the North and from the South.

We come.  
We come with our doubts,  
We come with our hopes,  
We come with our inadequacies  
and with our strengths.  
Come everyone, for this is a table where all are invited  
and all are welcome.

**Welcome:**

And so we gather at the table.  
We come from many places,  
differing in age, differing in race,  
differing in politics, sexual orientation and even religion.  
As we come together around the table  
we discover that our differences are not something we tolerate  
but that our differences are indeed a blessing,  
the more difference we bring, the more fully we experience  
the presence of the sacred in our midst.  
So come, children of God, just as you are.  
Wherever you are on this journey of life, you are welcome here,  
here in this place, here in this community, here at this table.  
Come, children of God, come and remember.

**Remembrance:**

We remember the stories that Jesus' friends tell,  
stories of bread broken and shared, feeding a multitude,  
stories of being gathered together, enemy and friend, around tables,  
stories of unlikely guests revealing the face of the sacred.  
They say that that  
it was on a night of both celebration and betrayal  
that he took the bread leftover on the table,  
blessed it and broke it;  
reminding them that it is  
in the breaking that we become whole,  
in losing our lives that we find them,  
in serving that we are served.  
As the grain scattered becomes one in the loaf,  
when we eat this bread, we become one with one another.

They say that he took the cup also leftover on the table,  
poured out and sharing,  
remembering with them, the life-giving breath  
even now pounding a rhythm through our veins,  
the breath of life from whence we come  
the breath that precedes and follows all that we can see  
As the grapes find life in the vine,  
when we drink this cup,  
we become at one with the source of life itself.

**Blessing:**

And so we pray:  
Come, holy Spirit, come.  
Bless this bread and  
bless this fruit of the vine.  
Bless all of us in our eating and drinking that our eyes might be open,  
that we might recognize the risen Christ in our midst,  
indeed in one another.  
Come, holy Spirit, come.

The Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also he took the cup after supper saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

This bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ. Take and eat, this is the body of Christ; do this in remembrance of him.

This cup of blessing which we bless is the communion of the blood of Christ. This cup is the new covenant in the blood of Christ; do this in remembrance of him.

**Prayer:**

Loving God, you have called us, fed us and nurtured us; now hear us as we bring before you the needs of the world:

In his name our troubled hearts speak to you, God, of those many people whose needs are great and whose comforts are few.

We speak to you of our concern for places where there is conflict, violence, and misery: war ravaged countries, domestic cruelty, bullying in school grounds, workplace intimidation, gang warfare on streets, or terrorist attacks.

We speak to you of our concern for all displaced people: in refugee camps, fugitives from oppression, those crowded on unseaworthy boats, those in our Australian detention centres, and for all separated families and traumatised children.

We speak to you of our concern for neighbours, workmates, or members of our own families who are 'doing it tough;' the unemployed and the disabled, some fighting terminal illness, others in

despair from broken relationships, some grieving a death, many caught up in predicaments for which there seems no obvious answer.

We speak to you of our concern for the church: with its flourishing or weak congregations, some living in comfort and others surviving under persecution, some filled with self doubts and some with over self-confidence, churches where there is conflict.

We speak to you now loving God of ourselves: Help us, in our own small way, to be more like your compassionate Christ. Shape our thoughts, sift our feelings, supervise our efforts, bless our abilities, that we may get the best out of each day and give the best to those around us.  
Through the grace of Christ Jesus our Redeemer.

**Amen!**

Hymn 654

We turn to you, O God of every nation,  
giver of good and origin of life;  
your love is at the heart of all creation,  
your hurt is people's pain in war and death.

We turn to you that we may be forgiven  
for crucifying Christ on earth again.  
We know that we have never wholly striven  
to share with all the promise of your reign.

Free every heart from pride and self-reliance,  
our ways of thought inspire with simple grace;  
break down among us barriers of defiance,  
speak to the soul of all the human race.

On all who work on earth for right relations,  
we pray the light of love from hour to hour.  
Grant wisdom to the leaders of the nations,  
the gift of carefulness to those in power.

Teach us, good Lord, to serve the need of others,  
help us to give and not to count the cost.  
Unite us all to live as sisters, brother,  
defeat our Babel with your Pentecost!

Benediction:

Let us part 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 compassion 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 each one of us and with all those we love, today and for ever more. AMEN