



The
United
Reformed
Church

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

Sunday 11th October 2020

Call to Worship:

May the peace of the Creator God be upon this world
binding all people together in unity and love.

May the peace of the forgiving Christ be upon this world
cleansing and restoring human relationships.

May the peace of the guiding Spirit be upon this world
replacing hatred with friendship and conflict with love.

I will sing of the Lord's great love for ever;
with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations.

I will declare that your love stands firm for ever;
that you established your faithfulness in heaven itself.

Prayer/Meditation:

We worship today in different places, we come from different backgrounds, we live in different circumstances. We worship today with our own different expectations, perhaps to be reassured, perhaps to be comforted, perhaps to learn something, perhaps to be challenged, perhaps to have our faith strengthened and affirmed.

We worship today with our own different worries and concerns, our own fears. For some of us there may be pressures at work or within our families; we may be seeking relief from the stress of daily life; we may be concerned about an uncertain future; we may be worried about a loved one or a friend.

We worship in the hope that our time here will offer inspiration or hope, or the solution to some question or problem that has been troubling us.

We worship to affirm our commitment to the gospel of Christ, and to explore ways of putting our faith into action, so that our faith is never just something we think about or a set of beliefs we hold on to, but a real part of our lives that influences our decisions and directs our actions and colours our relationships.

We worship to learn about Jesus; to affirm our faith in him and to remind ourselves that in Jesus we see the way to respond to God and to the world; in Jesus we see the way to treat other people; and in Jesus we discover what is important and what is not, we discover where the priorities of faith lie.

And we worship today to pray together. In our prayers, spoken or unspoken, we give thanks for all that is good in our lives and in the world; we confess our own shortcomings and weaknesses; we try to express our intentions for our own life of Christian service; and we bring to mind the needs of others, known and unknown to us, who suffer because of disease, disaster, or the selfishness of others.

So in our worship today may we each find what we seek, and at its end may we be changed, however slightly, having taken another step in the pilgrimage of faith, and ready once again in our own place and our own circumstances to engage in the ministry of the Kingdom of God.

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 5:1-12

Hymn 638

Thy kingdom come, O God,
thy rule, O Christ, begin;
break with thine iron rod
the tyrannies of sin.

Where is thy reign of peace
and purity and love?
When shall all hatred cease,
as in the realms above?

When comes the promised time
the end of strife and war,
and lust, oppression, crime
shall spoil the earth no more?

We pray thee, Lord, arise,
and come in thy great might;
revive our longing eyes,
which languish for thy sight.

O'er lands both near and far
thick darkness broodeth yet:
arise, O Morning Star,
arise, and never set!

Reading: Matthew 6:7-18

Reflection:

Last Sunday we looked at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer - 'Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name', and this week we continue our scamper through the Lord's Prayer with the short phrase, 'Thy Kingdom come'.

I remember once being given an essay to write in which we were asked to sum up the purpose of Jesus' mission in one short sentence of twelve words or less. After getting our over our disappointment that this wasn't to mean that the entire essay should be twelve words or less, we set about thinking about all the things Jesus did and said. We thought long and hard along all the traditional Christian lines of saving the world from its sin, bringing healing and reconciliation, offering himself for the life of the world, and so on, but quickly decided that none of these really summed up what it was that Jesus was about. Eventually most of us came to the conclusion that Jesus' life and ministry was all about the kingdom of God. And we arrived

at this conclusion because so much of what Jesus said was to do with the kingdom of God. He introduced many of his stories with the words, 'the Kingdom of God is like this...'; he sometimes said to people, 'it is only by doing ABC and avoiding XYZ that you can enter the kingdom'. And if Jesus *said* so much about the kingdom, it's perhaps not too much of a stretch to suggest that the things he *did* can also be seen as having something to do with God's kingdom. He told stories about the justice of God's Kingdom, but he also demonstrated justice in his dealings with people. He told stories about the unconditional love of God's Kingdom, but he also showed that unconditional love to those around him. So the twelve words or less that sum up Jesus' mission might be something along the lines of 'Jesus came to proclaim the establishment of God's kingdom.' That's nine words. The other two thousand, four hundred and ninety-one words of the essay would have been an attempt to justify the first nine.

But having established a case for the Kingdom of God being the basis of all Jesus' ministry, we remain faced with the sixty-four thousand dollar question: this Kingdom that was so important to Jesus, what is it? where is it? and when is it? The second two we can dispose of reasonably quickly, the where and the when. Last Sunday, when looking at the words 'our Father which art in heaven' we looked at the location of heaven and suggested that heaven is not a separate place where God lives. Rather wherever God is, there is heaven. So with 'thy kingdom come' we can say that is not a place where God reigns, but wherever God reigns, *there* is the kingdom of God. Indeed, the way the expressions are used in the gospels, we might say that the terms 'Kingdom of Heaven' and 'Kingdom of God' are interchangeable. God's Kingdom is where God reigns.

Similarly, we can say that the kingdom of God is not a *time*, some far off date in the future to which the dead in Christ will arise. That aspect of the Kingdom, that it is something that will come in the future, is certainly present in the teaching of Jesus, but the tradition of the church has often accepted it to the exclusion of any other understanding. Victorian protestantism, of which we are the heirs, produced a huge body of writing in commentaries and hymns, about the future bliss of the kingdom of heaven, often contrasting it with the tedium and misery of this life on earth. 'There is a happy land, far, far away, where saints in glory stand, bright, bright as day. O, we shall happy be when from sin and sorrow free, Lord, we shall live with Thee, Blest, blest for aye.' That hymn is quite specific that the kingdom of heaven is far far away; whatever its relationship with this world of ours, it is obviously a distant one. For hymns like this, the kingdom of God is unattainable without leaving this one altogether, and can only be gained after death. Now, for many of us brought up on hymns like those, they may indeed represent our feelings about the kingdom of God - something that we can aspire to as a reward for our faithfulness in this world. But if we look at Jesus' understanding of the Kingdom of God in the gospels, we will find something a bit different.

Because Jesus spoke of the kingdom being close, rather than far, far away. Indeed he spoke of it being present in his own time and place. There is not time now to go through every reference Jesus ever made to the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven, but if we did - and you should try it at home - we would find Jesus saying things like: 'The Kingdom of heaven is near (Mt 4:17)'; 'some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power (Mk 9:1)'; 'anyone who does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. (Mk 10:15)'; 'You are not far from the kingdom of God' (Mk 12:34); 'The kingdom of God is near you' (Lk 10:9); and of course the beatitudes of Matthew chapter 5, a kind of kingdom manifesto, where Jesus suggests that the kingdom has already come to those who are poor in spirit and those who are persecuted. For Jesus the Kingdom is not just a far away place at a distant time in the future, but - as well as a coming kingdom it is also a present kingdom. It is a state of affairs where all people live in a certain way and relate to each other in the way spoken of and demonstrated by Jesus.

For us this means a mission to change the world. We believe we are called to follow Jesus by both inhabiting and proclaiming the Kingdom of God. We are called to share our belief that this world, today and in the future, could be a better, fairer, more just - *happier* place if the words of Jesus of Nazareth were heard and the example of Jesus of Nazareth were followed. Because in his life we see the life of the kingdom of God and in his stories we hear the words of the Kingdom of God. And if we really believe the truth of Jesus words and example, then the prayer that must underpin all our worship and all our work and all our relationships must be those three words: 'Thy Kingdom come.'

Next Sunday we shall see how God's will can be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Prayer:

We pray for ourselves and others, for the church and for the world.

We pray that your Kingdom may come, but there are those who cannot hear because their world is filled with the sounds of suffering and for them there is only bad news.

We pray that your Kingdom may come, but there are those for whom healing is a forlorn hope or just an impossibility.

We pray that your Kingdom may come, but still there are millions living in the shadow of hunger and death while other live extravagant wasteful lives.

We pray that your Kingdom may come, perhaps without really knowing what we mean by it; happy to live with the knowledge that prisons throughout the world are filled beyond capacity.

And so in our prayer of intercession we remember those to whom we are called to bring good news. We remember those who suffer; those for whom each day brings more bad news; those whose relationships with others bring them not love but misery; those whose work is not an expression of their talent or skill but an endless struggle to provide for themselves and their dependents.

God of the poor, **may your Kingdom come.**

We remember those who are deprived of even the essentials of life; who live in poverty so desperate it is hard for us even to imagine; who live with pain and sickness because no medical help is available to them; who have to rely on their children to be providers.

God of love, **may your Kingdom come.**

We remember those who are trapped by poverty, unable because of their circumstances to realise dreams and ambitions; and those who are trapped by their wealth, unable to relax, fearful of future loss.

God of justice, **may your Kingdom come.**

We remember people in our own community and our own church, and think now in a moment of silence of those known to us who need our prayers ...

As we pray for others, let us not think that our prayer is a fulfilment of our calling to mission; let us not believe that by words alone we can bring good news; let us not rest believing we have done our bit.

Transforming God, **may your Kingdom come.**

May our prayer be the starting-point of our proclamation; may our thoughts about the plight of others be the seeds of generosity, the beginning of service, the catalyst of caring; may our prayer go with us out from here into the world and may we ourselves be its answer; in the ways we treat other people; in our attitudes and responses to those who are different from us, in our understanding of those who are culturally and geographically far from us, and in our desire to serve the kingdom of God by serving others.

God of Good News for all people, **may your Kingdom come.**

Hymn 200

The kingdom of God
is justice and joy;
for Jesus restores
what sin would destroy.
God's power and glory
in Jesus we know
and here and hereafter
the kingdom shall grow.

The kingdom of God
is mercy and grace;
the prisoners are freed,
the sinners find place,
the outcast are welcomed
God's banquet to share;
and hope is awakened
in place of despair.

The kingdom of God
is challenge and choice:
believe the good news,
repent and rejoice!
His love for us sinners
brought Christ to his cross:
our crisis of judgement
for gain or for loss.

God's kingdom is come,
the gift and the goal;
in Jesus begun,
in heaven made whole.
The heirs of the kingdom
shall answer his call
and all things cry 'Glory!'
to God all in all.

Benediction

Let us go into this week as people of God's Kingdom
encouraged by the love of God
clothed with the nature of Jesus
reinforced by the strength of the Holy Spirit.

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