



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

Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2020

Call to Worship:

The world belongs to God,  
**The earth and all its people.**  
How good it is, how wonderful,  
**To live together in unity.**  
Love and faith come together,  
**Justice and peace join hands.**  
If Christ's disciples keep silent  
**These stones would shout aloud.**  
Open our lips, O God,  
**And our mouths shall proclaim your praise.**

Prayer/Meditation:

God  
whose love  
is vast and measureless,  
wider than the universe,  
unlimited and infinite:

In wonder  
**we worship you.**

God  
whose love  
will never run dry,  
will never fall short,  
will never fail:

In wonder  
**we worship you.**

God  
whose love  
knows nothing of our distinctions,  
our notions of 'deserving' and 'undeserving',  
and which encompasses everyone:

In wonder  
**we worship you.**

God of mercy,  
we place our trust in tangible things—  
things we can see and touch—

and question whether you are really there.

Forgive us, Holy One,  
when we fail to recognize  
that you are always nearby,  
patiently waiting for us to recognize  
your presence and your glory.

Help us when we lose our way,  
and forgive us when we forget  
to whom we truly belong.

Open our eyes to see you;  
open our ears to hear you;  
open our hearts to love you;  
and open our hands to serve you.

God  
your love is beyond all we can tell,  
yet we know that you are here with us,  
wherever we are today,  
and that your love infuses every detail of our lives.  
We offer you hearts filled with gratitude.  
May God show us mercy,  
forgive us our sins against love  
and lead us to life that lasts:

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 16:4-12

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.

- Philip Doddridge (*altd.*)

Reading: Mark 8:1-8

Reflection:

Today we're looking at that part of the Lord's Prayer that asks, 'Give us this day our daily bread'. The two scripture readings we heard earlier remind us just where our food - our physical sustenance - comes from. In the midst of their wanderings in the wilderness, Moses and his people, having escaped slavery in Egypt, are now hungry, and we read the story of God's promise to provide for them. The message is that in life, as in the Exodus, it is God who provides.

The message is the same in the story from the gospel according to Mark. Here we have Jesus feeding the multitude, and whether we understand the story as a miracle of God's intervention, or as call to the just sharing of resources, the message is the same - in God's kingdom, under the leadership of Jesus, no one goes hungry.

So when we pray, 'give us this day our daily bread' we are looking back to one of the foundational episodes of the Hebrew Bible, and to one of the key elements of the Christian gospel.

A small band of Jesus' followers, members of the Jewish nation, were the first ones to hear the Lord's Prayer. Theirs was a society that believed in a God who was in control of every aspect of the natural and the human world. The God to whom the Lord's Prayer is addressed, is the God who provided the Israelites with food for forty years in the wilderness, the God whom Psalm 121 says is 'thy shade and thy keeper at thy right hand', the God who in Psalm 23 is the shepherd of the flock, the God who, in Psalm 139, has searched and known his people, who knows when they sit down and rise up, who discerns their thoughts. Coming from a tradition in which God is as close as that, it is hardly surprising that the disciples - and indeed Jesus himself - should regard God as the one who provides food on a daily basis, and it was quite natural for them to pray 'give us this day our daily bread'.

Even more so, in fact, because of their circumstances. The disciples were people who had apparently left everything behind them in their desire to follow Jesus. They had, at least for this period in their lives, no homes, no jobs, no income. They were reliant upon the generosity of sympathisers to provide them with the food and shelter they needed. And when we consider how uncertain was that provision, it is again no wonder that part of their prayer should be for the very basic necessity of life - food. Even though Matthew describes Jesus assuring them only a few verses later that God *will* provide all they need to sustain life - food and shelter - and that therefore they should not worry too much about such things because their main concern should be about the

Kingdom of God, he seems to allow them, indeed to encourage them here, to include in their prayer the request that God continue to provide their daily sustenance.

When we come to look at our own faith tradition and the circumstances in which we live, we will see immediately that there are huge differences. 'Give us this day our daily bread' we pray - but most of us will have eaten today before we spoke those words.

We do not in our society, even in our Christian society, tend to be so aware of God as provider that we feel the need to pray for such basics as food. We are confident that the supermarket will provide, and that our salaries or pensions will be sufficient to ensure that we will not starve. It's true that our perception of God may include the people and processes and even the supermarkets that are responsible for putting food on our tables, and it's true that we might well feel moved to give thanks - as we tend to do at harvest festivals - for all that is involved in keeping us fed; but we don't share with the disciples that sense of God's immediate responsibility for feeding us.

Nor are we in any real danger of *not* being fed. We may feel comfortable about praying for other people who are without food, and we may feel happy about praying for ourselves when we are in some kind of trouble, when we are ill, or when we feel we need help or guidance, but we are pretty well assured of our food supply. There seems little likelihood that our supply of food could ever be threatened to the point where we would feel it necessary to pray on a daily basis for bread.

And further to that, we might even claim that there is something slightly hypocritical about people in our position praying for bread for ourselves when we already have so much and others have so little. But it is an uncomfortable facet of our Christian tradition that we have been encouraged for centuries into a personal relationship with God in which we relate to God as an individual, giving thanks for what we have been given and asking for what we want. The number of hymns both traditional and modern that are written in the first person singular is a rather frightening illustration of this, from the traditional like 'I'm not ashamed to own my Lord', to the modern, 'I want to learn to appreciate you, Lord, in every way'. That's not to suggest of course that a personal faith and a personal relationship with God is wrong or a bad thing in any way, but when it comes to dominate our prayer and worship, as is sometimes the danger, then it overshadows and sometimes obliterates altogether the far stronger strand in the gospel of proclaiming the Kingdom of God for all people.

For the other uncomfortable fact is that there are many in our world - many *millions* indeed - who are truly starving. Children are dying of hunger every day while we in the West pray 'give us this day our daily bread' and lament when there is a shortage of avocados.

The Lord's Prayer is sometimes known as the 'family prayer' or the 'community prayer', and it may be that it is only by looking at it in this way that we can actually say the words in good conscience. When we say, 'give *us* this day our daily bread' we are not just asking for something for ourselves; the 'us' is not just we who are at worship together, not just ourselves and our families, not even the family of Christian people throughout the world - it is the family of humankind. We pray that the God of the Old Testament who cared for and nurtured the people of Israel may now offer that care and nurture to all people; we pray that the supply of food, which overall is abundant, may

be available not only to us here but to all. And we may find, as we so often do, that in repeating the words of the Lord's Prayer we can see ways in which we ourselves may be part of the answer to our own prayer.

Next time we will try to find out about forgiveness...

Prayer:

Living God, we praise you for all that is good and precious in human life; the value, potential and uniqueness of every individual.

For our family of humankind,

**hear our prayer.**

We pray for all those whose humanity is abused and exploited - victims of violence, torture and abuse,

children drawn into the world of crime,

people addicted to drugs,

those living under corrupt and oppressive regimes.

For our family of humankind,

**hear our prayer.**

We pray for those whose humanity is diminished by prejudice and discrimination, subjected to insults, intimidation, hatred and suspicion, day after day denied justice, time and again deprived of the opportunity to prove themselves.

For our family of humankind,

**hear our prayer.**

We pray for those denied the chance to fulfil their potential, whether through lack of education, insufficient resources, or denial of their human rights.

For our family of humankind,

**hear our prayer.**

We pray for those whose lives are blighted by need, burdened by debt or unemployment, oppressed by poverty, hunger and homelessness, crushed by natural catastrophe or personal disaster.

For our family of humankind,

**hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who have lost their belief in their own worth, overwhelmed by self-doubt, beset by inner fears, their confidence broken,

their faith in the future destroyed.  
For our family of humankind,  
**hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who mourn at the loss of loved ones,  
life suddenly seeming empty of meaning  
and stripped of joy, and we pray for those who battle against sickness and disease,  
unable to live life to the full, and fearful as to what the future may hold.

For our family of humankind,  
**hear our prayer.**

Living God, grant that the day will come when the worth of all will be recognised,  
the rights of all respected,  
the good of all pursued,  
and harmony among all enjoyed.

Reach out in love, and show us how we can respond to the needs around us.  
For our family of humankind  
**hear our prayer.**

Hymn

Make me a channel of your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me bring you love;  
Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord;  
And where there is doubt, true faith in you;

O Master, grant that I may never seek  
So much to be consoled as to console;  
To be understood as to understand;  
To be loved, as to love with all my soul.

Make me a channel of your peace.  
Where there is despair in life, let me bring hope;  
Where there is darkness, let me bring your light;  
And where there is sadness, bring your joy:

O Master, grant that I may never seek  
So much to be consoled as to console;  
To be understood as to understand;  
To be loved, as to love with all my soul.

Make me a channel of your peace;  
For when we give we will ourselves receive.  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned  
And in dying that we gain eternal life.

- *Sebastian Temple (1928-1997), after St Francis*

Benediction

Let us go in peace, and may the Lord who fed the people in the wilderness pour out upon us the fullness of God's blessings; may our faith be grounded upon the rock which cannot move and our love be as bountiful as the love which sustains us every day:

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