



The
United
Reformed
Church

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

Sunday Worship 1st August 2020

Welcome to worship for Sunday 1st August 2021. Our worship today includes the sacrament of Holy Communion and as always you are warmly invited to take part. Please provide yourself with some bread and a little wine, or a cracker and some fruit juice or anything that can symbolise for you the body and blood of Jesus.

Call to Worship:

In all our weakness and strength,
with our youth-filled spirits and aging bodies,
we come to be your people, O God.
Strong in faith and eager with questions,
singing our praise and whispering our prayers,
we come to be your people, O God.
Filled with saintly determination
yet mindful of our human limitations,
we come to be your people, O God.
Made strong in your endless love for us,
we know ourselves to be yours and
we come to be your people, O God.
May we truly become your people today.

Prayer/Meditation:

God of the still, small voice
the noise of the world is loud.
Open our ears hear you.
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: Mark 10:13-16

Hymn 33

Eternal God, your love's tremendous glory
cascades through life in overflowing grace,
to tell creation's meaning in the story
of love evolving love from time and space.

Eternal Son of God, uniquely precious,
in you, deserted, scorned and crucified,
God's love has fathomed sin and death's deep darkness,
and flawed humanity is glorified.

Eternal Spirit, with us like a mother,
embracing us in love serene and pure:
you nurture strength to follow Christ our brother,
as full-grown children, confident and sure.

Love's trinity, self-perfect, self-sustaining;

love which commands, enables, and obeys:
you give yourself, in boundless joy, creating
one vast increasing harmony of praise.

We ask you now, complete your image in us;
this love of yours, our source and guide and goal.
May love in us seek love and serve love's purpose,
till we ascend with Christ and find love whole.

Reading: Luke 22:14-23

Reflection:

The sacrament of holy communion is, for most Christian churches, the central act of worship. It is seen as the ritual instituted by Jesus himself at the Last Supper, when he instructed his disciples to remember him every time they gathered together to share a meal.

It is small wonder, then, that the celebration of this sacrament has become such a cause of division and disagreement in the church through the ages. If it is indeed an instruction of Jesus that it should be continued, then obviously we want to do in the way that Jesus would want. But unfortunately, Jesus didn't leave any specific instructions about how, or how often, it should be done, or about just who should be involved in it, and all these questions the church has had to work out over the years. As we know, different churches have come to different conclusions about the celebration of the sacrament of Holy Communion - not just about how and when and with whom to do it, but about its very meaning - so that in the present-day church, there are enormous differences in practice and belief between churches of different traditions. And there are lots of questions about what we do and what it all means.

What happens at communion? Is it merely a memorial event designed to keep alive the church's memory of Jesus? Or does it have some far greater spiritual, even supernatural significance in which the spirit of Christ becomes present with the people and the body and blood of Christ become somehow present in the bread and in the wine?

Is communion a re-creation or re-enactment of the Last Supper? Some believe so and therefore believe also that the person presiding at a communion service is representing Jesus himself, and thus they insist that this person must be set apart for the calling of celebrating the sacrament - they must be ordained; and because they represent Jesus, they must be a man. Others believe that, if the sacrament is a re-enactment of anything it is a re-enactment of the disciples and followers of Jesus as they obey his instruction to remember him when they eat together, and therefore the sacrament of communion is something that can be led by anyone or no-one

How often should we celebrate communion? Jesus said 'as often as you eat the bread and take the cup', which isn't too helpful. If the sacrament of communion is indeed the most important act of worship in which the church engages, does that mean that we should do it as often as we possibly can. Every day, as is the practice in many churches? Or should we take the opposite view, that because it is so important and valuable we should engage in it only now and again - monthly or even quarterly - in order to keep it special and not take it for granted.

Who should participate in the sacrament? Some would prevent children from receiving communion because they do not understand it, yet as we read today in Mark's gospel, children were a group of people upon whom Jesus looked with apparently special favour and specifically instructed that they should not be prevented from coming to him. Some churches restrict participation to members of their particular denomination; some restrict it to people who are

members of any Christian Church anywhere; some restrict participation to people who profess some kind of faith in Jesus even if they are not a church member at all, and some don't make any conditions or restrictions, but leave it to the individual's conscience whether they feel it is appropriate for them to participate.

All these questions have been thrown into sharp relief in recent months as the spread of COVID-19 prevented churches from meeting together. Lots of churches have worshipped online, but what about celebrating the sacrament of communion? Was it just not possible? Or does the power God's Spirit transcend the traditions and doctrines of the church and bind us together into one community despite separation and isolation?

So many questions about the rights and wrongs of the celebration of the sacrament of Holy Communion, and perhaps the most striking thing about all these questions is how far removed they seem from the original simple story of Jesus gathering with his friends for a Passover meal on the night of his arrest.

Jesus said to his friends, 'When you gather to eat and drink together, remember me.'

We read again the story of the last supper, and Jesus' instruction to remember, and we recall particularly that this was Jesus' last night with his disciples and that he was soon to be arrested and put to death. We read the words about the body and the blood, and make the symbolic connection with the bread and the wine, and so our celebration of the sacrament becomes a solemn memorial to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

So one part - one major part - of our remembering is our thanksgiving for the sacrifice of Christ, our wonder and gratitude at his willingness to give up everything for the Kingdom of God, to give his life for the life of the world.

Yet there is even more to it than that. Jesus simply said to his disciples 'remember me'. In a time when visual memories like photographs didn't exist, and even written memories were uncommon, the way of keeping a person's memory alive was to tell and re-tell their story, and the disciples were asked to remember Jesus whenever they gathered to eat and drink. To tell and re-tell his story. Not just the story of that last night when they were given the instruction, but to 'remember him'. To remember everything he had and everything he did; to bring to mind the incident when the disciples tried to turn away the children who were bothering them and Jesus told them to let them come to him; to remember the stories he had told to the people on the hillsides and in the market-place; to remember the people they had met as they had travelled with him, the rich, powerful influential people; the poor honest hard-working people; the rogues and scoundrels; the faithful and the faithless; to remember how he talked to them, what he said to them, what he offered them, how he changed them.

Whatever the celebration of the sacrament means to each of us - and to each it will be different - it must always be a fulfilment of that simple instruction 'remember me'. Whether we celebrate in a solemn and formal way using elaborate rituals and all the best silverware, or whether it is a simple meal shared together by friends, or indeed participate through a virtual online environment, it is a memorial. We remember him, and we renew and refresh that memory every time we join in the sacrament; and we take that memory with us into the world. His disciples, telling his story, in his memory.

Hymn 439

As we break the bread
and taste the life of wine,
we bring to mind our Lord,
Man of all time.

Grain is sown to die;
it rises from the dead,
becomes through human toil
our common bread.

Pass from hand to hand
the living love of Christ!
Machines and people raise
bread for this feast.

Jesus binds in one
our daily life and work;
he is of humankind
symbol and mark.

Having shared the bread
that died to rise again,
we rise to serve the world,
scattered as grain.

Sacrament of Communion:

As Jesus shared meals with his friends long ago, so today we share this symbolic meal together. Separated by distance but united by faith, we eat and drink in his memory; we remember his life, his words and relationships; and we give thanks to God that his Spirit is with us to the end of the age.

The table of bread and cup is now made ready. It is our table, in our home; it is the table of Jesus and all who love him; it is an ordinary table, made holy by the presence of God's Spirit; it is the table of sharing with the poor of the world, with whom Jesus identified himself; it is the table of communion with the earth, in which Christ became incarnate.

So come to this table, you who have much faith and you who would like to have more; you who have shared this meal often and you who have not done so for a long time; you who have tried to follow Jesus and you who have failed; come. It is Christ who invites us to meet him here.

Let us hear the story of the Last Supper as told by the apostle Paul:

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, "this is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way he took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Let us pray.

Loving God, through your goodness we have this bread and wine to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made. May we know your presence in the sharing of this bread, so that we may know your touch in all bread, all matter.

We celebrate the life that Jesus has shared among his community through the centuries, and shares with us now. Made one in Christ and one with each other, we offer these gifts of bread and cup and with them ourselves, a single, holy, living sacrifice.

And now we join with all your people in offering our prayer and praise...

Hear us, O Christ, and breathe your Spirit upon us and upon this bread and cup. May they become for us your body, vibrant with your life, healing, renewing and making us whole. And as the bread and cup which we now eat and drink are changed into us, may we again be changed into you, bone of your bone, flesh of your flesh, loving and caring in the world...

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:

For all we have heard, and for all we have seen:

Thanks be to God

For all we have received and the hope we have been given:

Thanks be to God

For signs of God's presence here among us:

Thanks be to God

For peace and commitment which the world cannot destroy:

Thanks be to God

For the promise of love, now and forever:

Thanks be to God

God of compassion,
be close to those who are ill, afraid or in isolation.
In their loneliness, be their consolation;
in their anxiety, be their hope;
in their darkness, be their light;
through him who suffered alone on the cross,
but reigns with you in glory,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

Lord Jesus,
To the weary and overburdened,
You said, 'Come to me, and I will give you rest.'
Calm our fears and anxieties,
Sustain your church in faith, hope and love,
Bring our world through its tumult,
Grant wisdom to those with heavy responsibilities,
And health and comfort to those who are sick.

Spirit of healing and hope,
give skill, sympathy and resilience
to all who are caring for the sick,
and your wisdom to those searching for a cure.
Strengthen them,
that through their work health and strength may be restored;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

I invite you now to spend a few moments with your own prayer, in words or in silence; or simply in reflecting upon the stories we have read and the words we have heard in our worship today.

Hear our prayer, loving God, which we offer in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Hymn 620

For the healing of the nations, Lord, we pray with one accord;
for a just and equal sharing of the things that earth affords.
To a life of love in action help us rise and pledge our word.

Lead us, Father, into freedom; from despair your world release,
that, redeemed from war and hatred, all may come and go in peace.
Show us how through care and goodness fear will die and hope increase.

All that kills abundant living, let it from the earth be banned:
pride of status, race or schooling, dogmas that obscure your plan.
In our common quest for justice may we hallow life's brief span.

You, Creator-God, have written your great name on humankind;
for our growing in your likeness bring the life of Christ to mind;
that by our response and service earth its destiny may find.

Benediction

May the path
that Christ walks
to bring justice
upon the earth,
to bring light
to those who sit

in darkness,
to bring out those
who live in bondage,
to bring new things
to all creation:

may this path
run through our life.
May we be
the road Christ takes.

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 love, today and for ever more. Amen