



The
United
Reformed
Church

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

Sunday Worship 5th September 2021

Welcome to worship for Sunday 5th September 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:

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.

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.

Prayer/Meditation:

We worship today in different places, from our different backgrounds, 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, perhaps to find the support and inclusiveness of the Christian community, perhaps simply to enjoy the experience.

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 together today 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 proclaim to one another 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. 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 we pray that we may be changed by it, 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 25:31-46

Hymn 100

O love of God, how strong and true,
eternal and yet ever new,
uncomprehended and unbought,
beyond all knowledge and all thought!

O love of God, how deep and great,
far deeper than our deepest hate;
self-fed, self-kindled like the light,
changeless, eternal, infinite.

O wide, embracing, wondrous love!
We read you in the sky above,
we read you in the earth below,
in seas that swell and streams that flow.

We read you best in him who came
bearing for us the cross of shame;
sent by the Father from on high,
our life to live, our death to die.

We read your power to bless and save,
ev'n in the darkness of the grave;
still more in resurrection light
we read the fullness of your might.

O love of God, our shield and stay
through all the perils of our way!
Eternal love, in you we rest,
forever safe, forever blest.

Reading: Matthew 6:7-18

Reflection:

Last time we looked at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer - 'Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name', and today we continue our stroll 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.

Jesus' preoccupation with God's Kingdom is evident in the text of the Lord's Prayer itself. In the various English translation of the Bible, the words Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven are sometimes used to refer to the same thing, and we see in the Lord's prayer that Jesus talks about both. More than any other attribute of God - creativity, provision, forgiveness, deliverance - the emphasis of the Lord's Prayer is on God's rule in God's Kingdom. So it may be that this one little phrase of three words that we're looking at today is in fact one of the most important certainly in the Lord's Prayer and perhaps even in the whole of the new testament, because it is a phrase that could be seen to sum up the whole of Jesus' life and ministry. It is what he was all about; a prayer that his mission might be fulfilled. The whole sum of everything he said, all the stories he told and all the relationships he formed with all the people he met might have been directed towards this one purpose - that God's Kingdom might come.

But having established a case for the Kingdom of God being the basis of all Jesus' ministry, we remain faced with the biggest question of all: 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.

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. '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.' Hymns like those are 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. The Kingdom of God is imagined as 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 or 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. In my own tradition we are not very good at evangelism, yet we are certainly 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.'

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:

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

For the faith which draws us to worship week by week, joined as a family of God's people, we give thanks.

For the words of God we find in scripture, giving challenge and inspiration, we give thanks.

For the example of Jesus in relationships and responses to others, we give thanks.

For the opportunity to live as disciples, learning, following and proclaiming, we give thanks.

For the love that fills our lives, surrounding us and encouraging us when times are difficult, we give thanks.

For the call to worship and serve, and the responsibility of nurturing and caring for others, we give thanks.

We offer our prayers for those who are new to faith, who are filled with the excitement and enthusiasm of a new way of life, who are inspired and motivated to proclaim the good news of the kingdom; and for those whose faith is long-standing and may have lost the edge of excitement they once had, who are Christians by habit rather than conviction.

We offer our prayers for those whose faith sustains and encourages them, who gain from their faith the strength to cope with the trials and troubles of life; and for those who are filled with doubt and uncertainty, who seek the assurance that they are loved.

We offer our prayers for those who give of their time and skills to help others grow in faith, for those who preach the gospel and those who offer pastoral care and companionship; and for those who would like to share their faith but feel inhibited by their lack of knowledge or worried by the possibility of rejection or ridicule.

We offer our prayers for all people in any kind of need, thinking especially of those known to us who are in any kind of trouble or distress.

We offer our prayers for the church throughout the world, for its ministry and mission, for its worship and service to communities.

May our prayers be but a starting-point for our own deeper commitment to the life and work of the church, may the thoughts and feelings we express here be worked out every day in our dealings with other people, in our willingness to help where help is needed, to welcome the rejected and isolated, to care for the young and the immature in faith. And through our prayer, worship and service, may others come to grow in faith and commit themselves to discipleship.

In Jesus' name. Amen

Hymn 86:

God, who stretched the spangled heavens, infinite in time and place,
flung the suns in burning radiance through the silent fields of space,
we your children, in your likeness, share inventive powers with you.
Great Creator, still creating, show us what we yet may do.

Proudly rise our modern cities, stately buildings, row on row;
yet their windows, blank, unfeeling, stare on canyoned streets below,
where the lonely drift unnoticed in the city's ebb and flow,
lost to purpose and to meaning, scarcely caring where they go.

We have ventured worlds undreamed of since the childhood of our race;
known the ecstasy of winging through untravelled realms of space;
probed the secrets of the atom, yielding unimagined power,
facing us with life's destruction or our most triumphant hour.

As each far horizon beckons, may it challenge us anew,
children of creative purpose, serving others, honouring you.
May our dreams prove rich with promise, each endeavour, well begun.
Great Creator, give us guidance till our goals and yours are one.

Benediction:

Whatever fears and anxieties we must face:
let us walk in boldness, as beloved children of God,
walk in peace, under the shelter of the Most High
walk in faith, knowing Christ walks with us.

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