



The
United
Reformed
Church

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

Sunday Worship 7th November 2021

Welcome to worship for Sunday 7th November 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:

Why are we here?

Maybe we are here because we recognize in our own story
a greater story
one spoken since the beginning of time
by prophets, preachers and peacemakers
a story where God calls the world
into liberation and wholeness.

Maybe we are here because we have glimpsed
a moment of love that is beyond human reach
the grace that lies just beyond our finger tips
that transforms the ugly into breathtaking
the impossible into the real

Maybe we are here, not defined by faith
but with a deep conviction
that the ending to everyone's story is yet to be written
and can be shaped into life by justice and compassion.

Maybe we are here, no longer sure whether we belong
or how any of this makes a difference
struggling to remember the vision that inspired us
or the call that now eludes us.

Maybe we are here to search for God;
or to let God find us.

Prayer/Meditation:

when the world is no longer a paradise
and creation shows its full power over us still
and we are brought down to size on this small planet of ours

we worship

when the memories linger of the past
and war shapes us beyond our knowing
and conflict becomes a story of life

we worship

when the way is more barren than beautiful
when the path is more a climb than a stroll
when the desert expands and the horizon stretches

we worship

we worship
because we can

we worship
because we hope

we worship
because we know our vulnerability

when things shift
and we need to hold on

we worship

it is the only strength we have for the journey

We worship God, the gathering one
who calls us into community
with each other
to love and work,
to support and heal.

We worship God, the gathering one
who calls us into community
with all people;
to bring justice and hope,
freedom and truth.

We worship God, the gathering one
who calls us into community
with the whole creation;
to live in harmony,
to cherish and renew.

We worship God.
who makes us one.

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: Ruth 1:1-18

Hymn 35: *God is unique and one* -

Reading: Mark 12:28-34

Reflection:

You might be familiar with the Beatles song of 1967 'All You Need is Love'. It was written for the very first live television broadcast that linked different nations by satellite, and John Lennon and Paul McCartney had been asked to write a 'song containing a simple message that could be understood by all nationalities'. And they came up with 'All you Need is Love' as the chorus of the song. The verses, however, are a bit more obscure:

There's nothing you can do that can't be done.
Nothing you can sing that can't be sung.
Nothing you can say but you can learn how to play the game
It's easy.
There's nothing you can make that can't be made.
No one you can save that can't be saved.
Nothing you can do but you can learn how to be you
in time - It's easy.

But then:

All you need is love, all you need is love,
All you need is love, love, love is all you need.
Love, love, love, love, love, love, love, love, love.
All you need is love, all you need is love,
All you need is love, love, love is all you need.

For young Christians of the time, this song was a gift, for it seemed to sum up the Christian message in five words and it was universally popular into the bargain. No matter that the words of the verse seemed to be bordering on meaningless, the central message was clear - love is all you need. It's easy.

Today, that song remains an accurate metaphor for the Christian message. A simple, all-embracing message easily understood by all nationalities and cultures, but rather obscured by the near gibberish that goes with it.

We read from the gospel a similarly simple message: Love God, love our neighbours. That's what it's all about. No problem."

Loving God and loving neighbour should be easy. Love should be the answer and everything would be all right. But we look at our world. We look at our churches. What's the problem? What aren't we understanding?

If we truly believe what Jesus is saying to this scribe, we have to admit that love *is* the answer. But really to understand what Jesus is saying, we need to define what we mean by love and perhaps more importantly (because it's so easy for us to get comfortable with the familiar) we need to define who our neighbour is.

First, we need to understand that the love Jesus is talking about is not the same kind of romantic love sung about by almost every artist and group from Elvis Presley to Ed Sheeran; not the kind of love you fall into like a hole in the ground. This kind of love involves a deliberate choice. It's a commitment to living the kind of life Jesus lives. Jesus is telling his followers that to love God is to be loyal to God both when it's easy and when it's difficult. We must be willing to offer love that is sacrificial

But even if we can wrap our minds around the concept of being loyal to God -- of trying to live a godly life -- we have to remember that this love, this loyalty is bound up, as Jesus says, in loving our neighbour. We can't choose to do one or the other.

Then, of course, comes the hard bit. Just who does Jesus mean by our "neighbour"?

We know the answer to that: everyone is our neighbor, both those who are like us, those who are easy to love -- but also those who aren't just like us and those who are pretty hard to stand, let alone love. Not an easy thing to do. Our neighbours are also those whom we may never meet, but who might be touched through our outreach and prayer. The good news here is that they just might touch us.

Loving our neighbour isn't just about benefits we offer them. Remember the Old Testament lesson for today, that wonderful story of Ruth and Naomi. That's a story of love going in both directions. It's a story about loyalty, about sacrifice. Orpah wasn't being selfish or disloyal when she chose to return to her own mother's house, to her own people. That was a perfectly sensible and honorable thing to do in that culture. Ruth and Orpah weren't Jews -- they were Moabites. We can sense the love that Orpah had for Naomi, but she chose to take a chance at being remarried, perhaps among her own people. Ruth on the other hand, made a radical and courageous choice. Her love, her loyalty to Naomi was so fierce and dedicated that she couldn't abandon her mother-in-law even if it meant she might never be remarried, and might never be accepted by Naomi's people.

That kind of love asked a lot of Ruth and it asks more of us, too. Remember at the end of our Gospel passage, Jesus said to the scribe, "You are not far from the kingdom of heaven." (But you're not there yet.) And no one dared ask him any more questions. Being brought face to face with that concept of love -- the kind Jesus is really talking about -- the Bible's kind of love -- was maybe quite enough for Jesus' followers. They didn't yet understand love. Some of them eventually understood. Others walked away.

We began with a popular song from the 1960s, so let's end with another one. Written by the Everley brothers in 1960, it wasn't very successful until it was released by the rock band Nazareth in 1975. It's called 'Love Hurts':

Love hurts, love scars
Love wounds, and mars any heart
Not tough or strong enough
To take a lot of pain, take a lot of pain

Love is like a cloud, holds a lot of rain
Love hurts... ooh, ooh love hurts

Lennon and McCartney were right enough, of course. Love *is* all you need. But it's *not* easy. Sometimes it hurts, sometimes it takes sacrifice, and sometimes our whole life seems a quest to find the true meaning and value of love or, having found it, to learn how to practise it.

Hymn 447: I come with joy to meet my Lord

Sacrament of 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.

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:

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.

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 473: God is love

Benediction

Let us go now and listen for the voice of the Lord
and follow wherever it leads.
Let us never be dominated by anything or anyone.
But let us serve with compassion and faith, loving as we know we are loved.

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

