



The  
United  
Reformed  
Church

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

Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> December 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:      Around the world people gather to break bread and pour wine.  
                                 **We gather with them in heart and mind.**  
                                 Around the world the broken body is made whole.  
                                 **As part of that body we join in its unity.**  
                                 Around the world the Banquet of God is prepared for the table.  
                                 **We, who share in the banquet, come eagerly to be fed.**  
                                 Let us worship together, let us share God's bounty.

                                 Into the dark places of the world where people are frightened and hungry  
                                 **God bring light, bring love, bring peace.**  
                                 Into places where people are fighting; into places where people have no homes  
                                 **God bring light, bring love, bring peace.**  
                                 Into the places where we feel unsafe; into situations that hurt us and scare us  
                                 **God bring light, bring love, bring peace.**

Prayer/Meditation:

We come to worship now, looking forward to worship but perhaps not fully focussed on the things of God; eager to sing our praises but perhaps not knowing all of today's hymns; ready to offer our prayers but perhaps with a mind that is so full we can't concentrate; wanting to immerse ourselves in worship but perhaps unable to stop thinking about what we have planned for when our worship time is over; seeking God's word but perhaps unsure how to listen; sure of our faith but perhaps doubting our belief.

Wherever we may be on our faith journey; whatever we may be thinking or planning; however we may be feeling today, may we know that we are a community of God's people even as we worship apart, that the weak and unsure may be carried by the strong, the uncertain and doubting be encouraged by the confident, and the preoccupied and distracted be comforted by those at peace.

Brothers and sisters together in Christ, we come this day to take another tiny step in our journey of faith, to seek another glimmer of truth and to offer, in our awkward and imperfect way, another half-hour of worship in this season of Advent.

When we are tempted to throw ourselves into the celebration of Christmas without much thought for the truth of the gospel; when we are tempted to think of the story of Jesus' birth as a pretty fable without much relevance for today's living; when we are tempted to go to the other extreme and pass harsh judgement on the secular celebration of the holiday season, or set our intellect aside and wallow in tales of angels and kings; when we are tempted to think that, as Christians, we should have all the answers, an explanation for every miraculous event or act

of God; when we are tempted to let Christmas wash over us in a warm soothing wave of comfort and nostalgia; when we are tempted to seek hope and joy only for *ourselves* at Christmas time - may God's forgiveness draw us close to the good news of the coming of Christ; may God's forgiveness assure us of the new dawning of truth and understanding that comes through Christ; may God's forgiveness release us from narrow religiosity and free us to think and believe in meaningful ways; may God's forgiveness reassure us that we need not know everything, but that our life is a pilgrimage on which we travel together seeking truth, justice and peace for all the world; may God's forgiveness liberate us from the worn traditions of the past and encourage us to search for ever new ways of expressing our joy at the coming of Christ; may God's forgiveness renew and recreate us, opening our hearts and minds to the concerns of all the world. In the name of the one who came to save, Immanuel, God With Us.

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: Philippians 4:4-9

Hymn 131

The voice of God goes out to all the world;  
his glory speaks across the universe.

The Great King's herald cries from star to star:  
'With power, with justice, he will walk his way!'

The Lord has said, 'Receive my messenger,  
my promise to the world, my pledge made flesh,  
a lamp to every nation, light from light:  
with power, with justice, he will walk his way!

'The broken reed he will not trample down,  
nor set his heel upon the dying flame.  
he binds the wounds, and health is in his hand:  
with power, with justice, he will walk his way!

'Anointed with the Spirit and with power,  
he comes to crown with comfort all the weak,  
to show the face of justice to the poor:  
with power, with justice, he will walk his way!

'His touch will bless the eyes that darkness held,  
the lame shall run, the halting tongue shall sing,  
and prisoners laugh in light and liberty:  
with power, with justice, he will walk his way!'

Reading: Luke 2:1-14

Reflection:

‘Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!’

In 1864 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote a poem about peace.

“I heard the bells on Christmas Day  
Their old familiar carols play,  
And wild and sweet the words repeat  
Of peace on earth, good will to men.”

That’s the promise. But then Longfellow turned sorrowful, and wrote,

“And in despair I bowed my head;  
‘There is no peace on earth,’ I said,  
For hate is strong and mocks the song  
Of peace on earth, good will to men.”

Today, more frightening than the poet could have seen a century and a half ago, smart bombs and heat-seeking missiles and all the technology of warfare leave us worrying and wondering, yet again, where is the peace that is promised?

What has the world done about peace? To what have we given ourselves in order to make peace happen?

In Jesus’ day there were people who thought that the Roman Empire would bring peace and stability. Rome had an extensive system of control; its military might was felt far from the capital city. It even bought off local rulers like Herod to keep them loyal. And yet there was no peace. Maybe a time of uneasy quiet for a while, but not peace.

In Jesus’ day some trusted in wealth to make themselves invulnerable. It was a time, much like ours, when accumulating wealth was important to many people. They built fine houses; they constructed great palaces. They even sought God’s favour by parading their financial muscle; the same Herod who wanted to kill all the boy babies had just completed a major remodeling of the Temple in Jerusalem, as if to say, “Here, God, let me show you how much You need me.” It was a time in which your stature and your character were measured by the weight of your bags of gold.

And yet there was no peace. No peace because when you spend your life doing nothing but gathering wealth, well, you have spent your life, and it’s gone. But it has no meaning. Jesus told that story about the man who filled his barns with grain, and when they got full, he pulled them down to build bigger barns, and when he faced up to what that meant, he discovered that it actually meant nothing.

It was a time when some had come to trust in government; it was a time when some trusted in wealth; and, most of all, it was a time when people trusted in their own ingenuity to get by.

And so of course there is no peace.

Yet the angels sang of a new peace, a peace that would be brought by this tiny child, lying in a Bethlehem manger. A peace that would be brought by one unable to wage war, one who owned nothing, not even a place to spend his first night in the world, one who could not even take care of himself, much less manage a world in conflict. Peace, from this child? How? But that is what the angels sang.

Jesus is the bringer of peace because He shows us *God's* peace. From the moment of the announcement of His birth, when Mary heard that He would put down the mighty from their seats and exalt the lowly, Jesus was on the side of the poor, the displaced, and the ordinary. His angels came to ordinary shepherds, rough men, not to kings and princes. His youth was shaped by peasant people in a rural village called Nazareth, not in the great capital city Jerusalem. When He enlisted followers, He found them among the working poor, and discouraged those who needed comfort and security.

Jesus is the bringer of peace, because He shows us that we can live without concerning ourselves with social standing. Peace comes because we learn that in Jesus' world, everybody is somebody and nobody is turned away.

He is reaching out to us. He is pleading with us. His very heart and life are urging us to come home. For without reconciliation with God, there is no true peace. We can frame all the political settlements we want; we can fight all the wars in the name of peace, but if the peace and love of God are not honoured in our hearts and in the heart of the world, there will be no lasting peace.

But in Him, all things are possible. With Him, peace can come. That is why we cannot run away and hide from the world; why we cannot let terrorists terrorize or pessimists bring us down. If we believe in the peace of God, let us live peacefully and speak words of peace. Let us do it by committing ourselves to our mission, both here and around the world. Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with us and with what we do and say to extend the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. The way to peace, ultimately, is to share a vibrant witness to the Good News of God's kingdom

We have heard the song of the angels. And because we have heard that, the noise of war and the empty silence of loneliness are all taken away. Jesus takes them away, and brings peace.

“Till, ringing, singing on its way,  
The world revolved from night to day  
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime,  
Of peace on earth, good will to men.”

#### HYMN

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry  
announces that the Lord is nigh.  
Awake and hearken, for he brings  
glad tidings from the King of kings!

Then cleansed be every life from sin:  
make straight the way for God within,

and let us all our hearts prepare  
for Christ to come and enter there.

We hail you as our Saviour, Lord,  
our refuge and our great reward.  
Without your grace we waste away  
like flowers that wither and decay.

Stretch forth your hand, our health restore,  
and make us rise to fall no more.  
O let your face upon us shine  
and fill the world with love divine.

All praise to you, eternal Son,  
whose advent has our freedom won,  
whom with the Father we adore,  
and Holy Spirit, evermore.

Communion:

Among friends, gathered round a table, Jesus took bread, and, having blessed it, he broke the bread and gave it to his disciples saying, 'This is my body which is given for you.' In the same way he took wine, and, having given thanks for it, he poured it out and gave the cup to his disciples saying, 'This cup is the new relationship with God, sealed with my blood. Take this and share it. I shall drink wine with you next in the coming kingdom of God.'

So now, following Jesus example, we take this bread and this cup; the ordinary things of the world through which God will bless us.

Loving God, we give thanks for your love revealed to us in Jesus, and we thank you that through him, through his life and example, his death and resurrection, we can live in the faith that your kingdom will come, and that in life, in death and beyond death you are with us.

Lord Jesus Christ, present with us now, as we do now what you did in an upstairs room, breathe your Spirit upon us and upon this bread and this cup, that they be spiritual food and drink for us, renewing, sustaining and making us whole, and that we may be your body on earth, loving and caring in the world. Amen.

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, 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.

*The bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ.*

*The cup of blessing which we bless, is the communion of the blood of Christ.*

Prayer:

Loving God, as we have received these gifts of bread and wine,  
you have fed us with the spiritual food of the body and blood  
of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Thank you for assuring us of your goodness and love,  
and that we are members of his body.

**Renew us by your Holy Spirit,  
unite us in the body of your Son,  
and bring us with all your people  
into the joy of your eternal kingdom;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

Heavenly Father, we are not altogether convinced that darkness is a thing of the past. Many people in this world of ours feel their world is one of darkness and gloom. Pressures crowd in upon us and get us down.

There are many causes: bereavement, illness, money, worries about family, trouble at work or not having work, drugs, drink, boredom, doubt, weariness, futility.

And there are the world issues: war, poverty, climate change, disease, unfair trade. It does not help when we feel that as Christians we should be doing so much better than we are. Gracious and loving God, we rejoice that you are with us in our troubles, you know us and you love us - always.

Even when we fail to live up to our calling, you remain faithful. We rejoice that your Son came not to a perfect world, but to a broken world, our world. To bring light to the darkness, our darkness.

We pray for our dark and dreary world, a world in need - in need of love and grace, forgiveness and new life, hope, peace and fellowship, in need of renewal.

We pray that you would come alongside us and all those for whom we pray, that you would show us Jesus, the light of the world, the one who came (and who comes) to give us life and health and peace, peace that passes all understanding - not a temporary respite from trouble but the strength to overcome it and ultimately to receive life in all its fullness.

Help us to share the good news in word and action - the same good news that the fishermen were called to proclaim that in Jesus we see the face of a merciful God who loves us and whom we can love.

We have been set free. Enable us to use our freedom to share in bringing in the kingdom. In the light of this we have something to celebrate, something to shout about - for even in our trouble and pain, even in our loss, we know that Jesus is with us.

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, which we offer in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Hymn 642

We utter our cry; that peace may prevail!  
that earth will survive and faith must not fail.  
We pray with our life for the world in our care,  
for people diminished by doubt and despair.

We cry from the fright of our daily scene  
for strength to say 'No' to all that is mean:  
designs bearing chaos, extinction of life,  
all energy wasted on weapons of death.

We lift up our hearts for children unborn:  
give wisdom, O God, that we may hand on,  
replenished and tended, this good planet earth,  
preserving the future and wonder of birth.

Creator of life, come, share out, we pray,  
your Spirit on earth, revealing the Way  
to leaders conferring round tables for peace;  
that they may from bias and guile be released.

Come with us, Lord-Love, in protest and march,  
and help us to fire with passion your Church,  
to match all our statements and lofty resolve  
with fervent commitment in action involved.

Whatever the ill or pressure we face,  
Lord, hearten and heal, give insight and grace  
to think and make peace with each heartbeat and breath,  
choose Christ before Caesar and life before death!

Benediction:

God, bless each of us as we travel on. In our times of need may we find a table spread in the wilderness and companions on the road. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with each of us, and with all those we love, today and for ever more. Amen

