



The
United
Reformed
Church

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

Sunday 4th September 2022

Our worship today includes the sacrament of Holy Communion. You are warmly invited to participate, and I'd invite you to provide yourself with a little bread and wine, or a cracker and some fruit juice, or any thing that can symbolise for you the body and blood of Jesus.

Call to Worship:

We offer our worship today in different places.

O God, do not be far from us.

We offer our worship this morning for different reasons.

O God, do not be far from us.

We experience the presence of the Spirit in different ways.

O God, do not be far from us.

We hear Jesus' words with different ears.

O God, do not be far from us.

“Deny yourselves.”

O God, do not be far from us.

“Take up your cross.”

O God, do not be far from us.

“Follow me.”

O God,

**we thank you for drawing near to us
in this place,
in our lives.**

Prayer/Meditation:

O Lord our God, we come to worship with songs of praise in our hearts,
because of your unfailing love and faithfulness.

Even though we struggle with life's issues, your mercy blesses us.

Listening God, we come together with prayers of thanks in our hearts,
because you hear and answer our prayers.

Even though life is sometimes difficult, your strength blesses us.

Welcoming God, we come together with reverent worship filling our minds,
because your faithful love endures forever.

**Even though we are fragile people
who sometimes feel lost and abandoned,
your love blesses us and never changes.**

Faithful God,
we come into your presence with thanksgiving,

deeply grateful for the unfailing love and faithfulness
you have shown toward us, your people.
When we are exhausted, you give us the strength to go on.
When we find ourselves in trouble,
you are there, standing beside us.

Holy God, Creator of Life,
you call us out of our dark places,
offering us the grace of new life.
When we see nothing but hopelessness,
you surprise us with the breath of your spirit.
Call us out of our complacency and routines,
set us free from our self-imposed bonds,
and fill us with your spirit of life, compassion, and peace,

And so we come before you in gratitude and praise,
offering you the worship of our hearts and lives.
Open our eyes to see and know you here among us;
open our ears to recognize your voice.
And then send us out from here,
to live and work in the world as your faithful disciples.

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 549:

One more step along the world I go,
one more step along the world I go,
from the old things to the new
keep me travelling along with you:

Chorus

And it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.

Round the corner of the world I turn,
more and more about the world I learn;
all the new things that I see
you'll be looking at along with me:

Chorus

And it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.

As I travel through the bad and good,
keep me travelling the way I should;
where I see no way to go
you'll be telling me the way, I know:

Chorus

And it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.

Give me courage when the world is rough,
keep me loving though the world is tough;
leap and sing in all I do,
keep me travelling along with you:

Chorus

And it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.

You are older than the world can be,
you are younger than the life in me;
ever old and ever new,
keep me travelling along with you:

Chorus

And it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.

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 churches 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 some believe that, because they represent Jesus, they must be a man. Other churches 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 churches prevent children from receiving communion because they do not understand it, yet as we read this morning in Mark's gospel, children were a group of people upon 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.

How should we distribute the bread and the wine? Should we do as the Scottish Presbyterians did in the old days three or four hundred years ago and actually physically sit around a big table as we imagine the disciples must have done at the Last Supper? Should we all process to the front and receive the bread and the wine from the appointed person? Should we remain in our places while the bread and wine are brought to us? Is one particular kind of bread, or wine, better than another. Is the practice of using little individual glasses any better or worse than using one big silver chalice for everyone?

And of course what about the way we're doing communion here today? Is this kind of virtual communion service really valid? Can there be such a thing as online communion? Many would say no, after all we're not really gathered in any literal sense. We're in our own homes.

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.

It is when we look at that story that we can get the clearest idea of what our present-day celebration of the sacrament is all about, and what is important about it and what doesn't really matter so much.

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

Now when we celebrate the sacrament together today, what do we remember? 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 whether it is just you and me in this virtual environment, it is a memorial. We remember him, and we renew and refresh that memory every time we join together in the sacrament; and we take that memory with us into the world. His disciples, telling his story, in his memory.

Hymn 447:

I come with joy to meet my Lord,
forgiven, loved, and free,
in awe and wonder to recall
his life laid down for me.

I come with Christians far and near
to find, as all are fed,
the new community of love
in Christ's communion bread.

As Christ breaks bread and bids us share
each proud division ends.
The love that made us, makes us one,
and strangers now are friends.

And thus with joy we meet our Lord,
his presence, always near,
is in such friendship better known:
we see, and praise him here.

Together met, together bound,
we'll go our different ways,
and as his people in the world
we'll live and speak his praise.

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.**

And now hear us as we bring our prayers for others:

Compassionate God,
we pray for vulnerable people all over this world,
people without power
who live in places of terror and violence, fear and oppression.

Protect them, God;
we feel so powerless ourselves to help them.

Encourage and empower us to work
for peace and freedom from fear in our own contexts.

God of grace,
we pray for those whose lives have been turned upside down
by various disasters: floods, fire and drought-driven famine.
Bring courage and hope to them;
through their pain, may they remain connected to you in prayer.

We pray for those say there is no God;
may we through the living of our own lives
demonstrate the joy and peace of a Spirit-centred existence.

God of community,
we pray for our own church community;
may we be a source of hope for our wider communities.

Help us to discern needs and work to fulfill them.
Strengthen and unify our congregation
and show us how we can be the disciples you envision us to be.
Return the sick to health and well-being
and relieve the suffering of those who have lost loved ones,
are unable to find meaningful employment
and fear the challenges of old age.

Guide us, Great Shepherd,
into your paths of right relationships.

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 463:

Now let us from this table rise
renewed in body, mind and soul;
with Christ we die and live again,
his selfless love has made us whole.

With minds alert, upheld by grace,
to spread the Word in speech and deed,
we follow in the steps of Christ,
at one with all in hope and need.

To fill each human house with love,
it is the sacrament of care;
the work that Christ began to do
we humbly pledge ourselves to share.

Then grant us courage, Father God,
to choose again the pilgrim way,
and help us to accept with joy
the challenge of tomorrow's day.

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