



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

Sunday Worship 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2023

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: I Corinthians 11:23-32

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:

Sometimes in our monthly communion services, we have a look at the meaning and relevance of the communion service to Christians in the modern world, looking perhaps at some aspect of communion - community, fellowship, nurture, celebration, remembrance and so on - and try to relate it to our lives as 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians. Almost always when we consider communion as part of our worship, we make mention of the fact that the communion service means different things to different people. Today we're going to hear the imaginary results of an imaginary survey in which a number of fictitious people are asked to respond to the question, 'What does the sacrament of Communion mean to you?'

Stella, age 49, says: I believe that in the communion service a miracle takes place, and our Lord becomes truly present in the bread and in the wine. It is in the communion service that we can actually meet him face to face and participate in his death and resurrection. As all the congregation gathers and the bread and wine are consecrated, so they become the body and blood of Jesus, and Jesus is there right in church with us. And I'm not saying it's as if he's there, or that the bread and wine somehow represent him. No, I mean that the bread becomes his body and the wine becomes his blood. Nothing is impossible for God and nowhere are we closer to our Lord than in the bread and wine of the blessed sacrament.

Flora, age 87, says: the communion service is without doubt the most special and important act of worship the Christian Church can offer. So special, in fact, that the church I belong to celebrates communion only twice a year. We believe that familiarity breeds contempt, and that those churches which have communion too often - quarterly or monthly - lose something of the awe and wonder at the sacrifice of Christ that is remembered at communion. Although my church celebrates communion twice a year, I myself haven't eaten the bread or drunk the wine for over sixty years. I go to the church every Sunday and I pray with all the others, but on communion days I just stay at home, because the Bible says *he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body*. And although people over the years and to this day have tried to persuade me otherwise, I believe that I am not worthy to sit in the presence of the Lord at his table.

Stan, 37, a member of the salvation army, says: communion means very little to me - my church doesn't do it. It seems to me that communion is just a ritual of the church. It is no doubt very helpful to a lot of people in helping to express and share their Christian faith together, but it doesn't, as far as I believe, actually *do* anything. Unlike many Christians, I don't believe that your relationship with God is somehow damaged if you don't regularly take communion. How could it be? If God is love, as we all believe, then what difference is it going to make if we take part in a certain ritual or not?

Celia aged 20, a member of an independent evangelical church says: the communion service is important to me and sometimes I think my church doesn't take it seriously enough. Although I'm a member of an independent church, I sometimes go to my local parish church as well just so that I can participate in the communion. You see, above all it is in the communion

service that I am reminded of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for the sins of the world. I believe that, as the Bible says, our sins are washed away by the blood of Jesus, we are born again and empowered to live free and forgiven lives in him. To me that sacrifice of his life for mine is just incredible and I want to give thanks for that every day. In the communion service I am reminded that it is Jesus' body and Jesus' blood that has bought me the freedom I now enjoy - so I take communion as often as I can.

Joe, aged 60, attends church only occasionally. He says, I used to be a frequent and faithful church member, but I have come to realise over the years that it's all just man-made. Religion and the church and the Bible and even the communion service, it's all just there to give us something to do and to make us feel better. I'm not anti-religion, mind, I just don't think it is what it claims to be. I'm sure it's all done with the best of intentions, I'm sure the people who wrote the Bible believed what they were writing, and that the church, when it started celebrating the Lord's Supper, believed that it was truly perpetuating the memory of Jesus in obedience to his last commandment, but the fact is that Christianity has achieved very little over the last 2000 years, and that Christians even today are so obsessed with the structure and rituals of the church that they seem to have forgotten the things that Jesus was really saying. I do go to church now and again. I quite like the hymns sometimes.

Myra, age 66, says: I think communion is all about community. Don't the two words have the same root? Communion and community? For me it's all about being together and doing the same thing, sharing the same faith and the same vision and the same hopes for the future of the world. Some people believe that Christ is really present in the bread and the wine through some kind of miracle; I think Christ is really present all right, but not in the bread and the wine - in the people who are gathered in his name and in his memory. I believe that it's through the gathering and the working together of God's people that the Spirit of God truly works. You know that thing that says, 'he has no hands but ours...?' Well, that's what it's like. We are his body and when we are all together he is there, and somehow he is more real and more present when we gather to celebrate the sacrament of communion than at any other time.

Justin, aged 9, says: every month in church we hear the story of the Last Supper. It's about Jesus having dinner with his friends for the last time before he is arrested and taken away to be killed. When we've heard the story, we have some bread and some wine - it's not real wine, though - to remind us of the story. The minister told us that we eat the bread and drink the wine to help us to remember the story of Jesus and the Last Supper. I think it does help because we've done it so often that I know the story off by heart now.

Alexander, 42, a priest, says, there is nothing more moving than the re-enactment of those last hours of Jesus in the sacrament, when the congregation gathers around the table as the disciples did and the priest takes the place of Christ in delivering the final promise of salvation. It is what I became a priest for, to be the representative of Christ in his church today; the highest expression of my priesthood is when I consecrate the elements of the sacraments; they become the body and blood of Christ for the people, and I become the representation of Jesus standing among them and offering them the body and the blood, Christ's sacrifice becomes my sacrifice and I almost become one with him.

Molly, 70, says: My understanding of communion has changed over the years and will no doubt continue to change. I used to think there was something miraculous or supernatural about it, that God was somehow infusing the bread and wine with some kind of spiritual presence.

Now I have come to see that all that is just our own interpretation of it, and that all we're really doing is remembering Jesus and his disciples as they gathered in the upper room for their last meal together. And as we remember that one meal, so it brings to mind for us - well, for me at least - all that Jesus ever said and did during the three years he spent with his disciples and friends. It reminds me that he spoke always and often about the Kingdom of God, and it reminds me that, above all, I am called as a Christian to follow him. My understanding of where he might be leading me changes from time to time, and these days I am less sure that I was about exactly what we do at communion and what happens when we take the bread and wine. But, you know, that doesn't matter to me any more. It used to worry me if I couldn't come up with the answers, but these days I am content to have faith. Isn't that what Jesus asks us to do? To have faith?

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