



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

Sunday 18th February 2024

Call to Worship:

Hear and believe the good news: God has called us “my people”!

**God has set up a covenant, over and over again, choosing us even before we can choose,
faithful even when we are faltering.**

In the flood, in the wilderness, in exile; in certainty and doubt, abundance and scarcity; God’s
promise is true to the thousandth generation.

**We see the rainbow, we hear our names, we learn the commandments, we look up for our
help, we know in our hearts: we love because God first loved us, we follow because God
first came to us, we can be faithful because God is faithful.**

Come, let us worship God together.

Prayer/Meditation:

Lent calls us to journey, this and every day,
following Jesus wherever he leads us.

**Lent calls us to journey:
to the place where God covenants with us,
to receive the new life we are offered.**

Lent calls us to worship together,
to tell future generations the good news.

**Lent calls us to practice justice,
to bring God's hope to all people.**

Lent calls us to faithful living,
to trust the One who gives us life.

**Lent calls each of us to take up our cross,
to trust the One who bears it with us.**

Lent calls us to journey with God.

**We worship God, who walks with us,
this and every day.**

God of light and darkness,
through water and Word
you shine your light into the darkness of our lives.

We give thanks for this great gift.

God of love and hate,
your love comes in spite of our animosity;
you bring reconciliation to those who are divided.
Strengthen us to be peacemakers.

God of hope and fear,
you walk with us through the challenges which surround us.
Wash away our anxiety by your promised presence,
and lead us from despair to hope..

God of church and world,
in Jesus you reveal yourself to our world,
and bring your Kingdom into being.
Keep us from seeing your love as a hiding place.
Motivate us to infuse the world with your justice.

God of health and illness,
there is nothing that separates us from your love.
Inspire us to bring your health to the sick,
your encouragement to the discouraged,
your promise to the bereaved.

God of life and death,
all that exists is from you, and for you.
Enable us to trust your promise,
and serve this hurting world.

God who shines in the darkness,
receive these prayers and the prayers of our hearts,
in the name of the one who is your light,
Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose words we pray together now...

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: Genesis 9:8-17

HYMN 81:

Come, let us to the Lord our God
with contrite hearts return;
our God is gracious, nor will leave
the desolate to mourn.

His voice commands the tempest forth,
and stills the stormy wave;
and though his arm be strong to smite,
'tis also strong to save.

The night of sorrow long has reigned,
the dawn shall bring us light:
God shall appear, and we shall rise
with gladness in his sight.

Our hearts, if God we seek to know,
shall know him, and rejoice;
his coming like the morn shall be,
like morning songs his voice

As dew upon the tender herb,
diffusing fragrance round;
as showers that usher in the spring,
and cheer the thirsty ground:

so shall his presence bless our souls,
and shed a joyful light;
that hallowed morn shall chase away
the sorrows of the night.

Reading: Mark 1:9-15

Reflection:

On this, the first Sunday of Lent, we embark on a spiritual journey. It is a journey that mirrors the journey of Jesus from the beginning of his ministry at the river Jordan to its final agonising moments in Jerusalem. Through Lent, we go with him where he goes.

And the first place he goes is the wilderness, there to be tempted away from his mission - and we go with him, today reflecting on the temptations that seek to deflect us from the way of Jesus.

In this season of fasting and focus, of praying and preparing, we are tempted to just to go through the motions. We are tempted to avoid the wilderness, to turn away from encountering the wild places in our lives and in our world. We are tempted to turn away from the Tempter. But if we are to follow Jesus, if we are to be renewed for new possibilities and prepared to hope once more, we must face the wilderness..

Throughout history, we see our spiritual ancestors spending their time wrestling with the desert places. From the call of Abraham and Sarah to the wandering of the people of Israel for forty years, the wilderness has become a place of refining and self-discovery.

But our forbearers never faced the desert alone. For forty years, God journeyed with Israel. For forty days, God watched over Noah. For forty days, God stood with Jesus. And for our time, God stands with us.

If we are honest with ourselves, we know deep down inside that we need the wilderness. We know deep within our hearts that the desert calls us even when we resist. Our church, our community, our world—now more than ever—needs the wilderness. We need to spend the time looking at ourselves in order to find new life, new ministry, and new ways of being the people of God.

We'd prefer things to stay the same, for things to be frozen in time. This may be something we have learned about ourselves during the coronavirus epidemic and its enforced lockdown. The longer it goes on, the more we become desperate to get back to normal. The church has spent many centuries building its traditions and patterns of worship and mission. There have been many changes over the years, the church has developed and evolved, but basically we are happiest with what we know and love. In these past few months the patterns have had to change, the work has been restricted, and so many of the things we have enjoyed doing are impossible for us now. We long for the way things were in the past. We are in the

wilderness. But God is calling us, like the people of Israel, to a new future, and we cannot get to God's future if we are not able to move on from the past. God has work for us to do and that work begins, like it did with Jesus, when we are driven to the wild places of discovery.

We go to the wilderness to discover afresh the joy of being loved.
We go to learn once more what it means to be and live as part of God's kingdom.
We go to listen for the voice of God calling us again.
We go to see Christ more clearly in the world around us.
We go to the wilderness because that is where we encounter God.
We go to the wilderness because we can no longer be as we have always been.

And from the wilderness we may be able to see the sign of God's covenant, the rainbow, the sign of a covenant made not between God and Noah, nor between God and the people of Israel, nor even between God and the human family, but between God and every living creature. A sign of the link between God and the earth; a sign of promise and light set against the darkness of the rain clouds; a sign of the harmony of creation, beautiful in and because of its diversity

And it is there to remind God of the promise 'Whenever I cover the sky with clouds and the rainbow appears, I will remember my promise to you and to all creatures, that a flood will never again destroy all living beings'

We are in Lent, the period of preparation, the period of penance, the period leading up to Easter, when we will be presented with another sign of God's unending Love and Forgiveness. The sign of the Cross.

As we journey through Lent, may we be people who look for the signs of God's love and actions in the world; signs like the rainbow and the cross, and celebrate that God keeps covenant.

In Lent we follow Jesus again. We go with him into the wilderness, and we hope to emerge changed, stronger, and ready to face the challenges, obstacles and fears of the rest of our Lenten journey that leads us towards the rainbow, to the light and love of God's Kingdom.

HYMN 558:

Will You come and follow me,
if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
and never be the same?
Will You let my love be shown,
will You let my name be known,
will You let my life be grown
in you and you in me?

Will you leave your self behind
if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
should your life attract or scare,
will you let me answer prayer
in you and you in me?

Will You love the 'You' you hide
if I but call your name?
Will You quell the fear inside
and never be the same?
Will you use the faith You've found
to reshape the world around
through my sight and touch and sound
in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
and never be the same.
In your company I'll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
in you and you in me.

Prayer:

We pray today for all who are walking a hard journey:
for those whose daily paths encounter barbed wire and guns;
for those who did not want to leave home but were forced to;
for those who set out today in search of food and water;
for those whose journey is shattered by economic hardship;
for those whose journey is marred by pain or despair,
and for those who faithfully journey alongside them;
for those who are making a move and beginning again;
for those who are clinging on to something that has ended;
for those who are being bullied, and for those who are bullying;
for those who have just taken their first breath, and
for those who today will take their last.

May this Lenten journey, with its stories
about the hard places of Jesus' experience,
give strength and courage to all
whose journey is far from easy.
And may it inspire us to risk Christ's Way of love
as we share the journey with other travelers.

God of the blessed
we praise you,
for mercy shown, grace given,
living water, Spirit's power.

We ask you
for daily strength,
hope for tomorrow,

your word to guide,
strong feet to follow.

God of the oppressed
we bring to you
the broken ones, forgotten ones,
exploited and abused ones.
Bring freedom and release,
love and compassion
to damaged hearts and souls

God of the distressed,
we bring to you
the grieving ones, hurting ones,
suffering and wounded ones.
Bring wholeness and healing
comfort and relief,
to broken bodies and minds

God of the dispossessed
we bring to you
the lonely ones, the homeless ones,
thirsty, tired and penniless ones.
Bring hope and sustenance
physical and spiritual food,
to hungry bodies and souls.

The LORD is good to all;
God has compassion on all creation.
May the peace, love and compassion of the Lord
Be with all the world now and always

I invite you now to spend a few moments in your own prayer, in words or in silence, or simply in reflecting upon the words we have read and the stories we have heard in our worship today.

Hear our prayers, loving God, which we offer in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the one calls and leads and guides us through the wilderness times of our lives. Amen

HYMN 90:

O Lord, all the world belongs to you
and you are always making all things new
What is wrong you forgive
and the new life you give
is what's turning the world upside down.

The world's only loving to its friends
but your way of loving never ends
loving enemies too;
and this loving with you

is what's turning the world upside down.

The world lives divided and apart
you draw us together, and we start
in our friendship to see
that in harmony we
can be turning the world upside down.

The world wants the wealth to live in state,
but you show a new way to be great
like a servant you came,
and if we do the same,
we'll be turning the world upside down.

O Lord, all the world belongs to you
and you are always making all things new
What is wrong-you forgive,
and the new life you give
is what's turning the world upside down.

Benediction

May we find the road that leads to life;
may we take the turns that bring right relationships;
may we pause to accompany others on the way;
and may we journey with God through Lent,
and long for the horizon and the dawn.

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 we love, today and for ever more.
Amen

