



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

Sunday 3rd March 2024

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:

God's commitment to us is clear:
We see it in the life of Jesus.
God's commitment to us is complete:
We see it is the crucifixion of Jesus.
May God bless us, in this time of Lent,
as we walk with Jesus on his Calvary journey,
That our commitment may be clear
And our love complete.

Prayer/Meditation:

Gracious and Compassionate God,
As we journey through our time of Lent
Our time in deserts and low places
Our time on the mountains and high places
We continue to seek you.

We need you more than ever
in our busyness
our loneliness
our sadness
our depression
our anger
our happiness
our joy
our excitement

We need
your presence
your compassion
your grace
your comfort
your renewal
your healing
your peace
your joy
your love

your salvation

Lord we are
reminded that
all this is embodied
in your son Jesus
in his life
his death
and his resurrection

and that all
this was freely given
that we may have
abundant life
eternal life
fullness of life
freed lives
loved lives
loving lives
grace giving lives

Come Lord
pour your mercy and grace and love over us
And for these gifts from you we are grateful.

Covenant-making God,
you provide for us in many different ways,
and we confess that we do not always recognize you
at work in the world around us.

We get impatient,
wanting you to work on our schedule.
We wish for something more or different
than what you have offered.
We want someone else to solve
problems we have had a hand in creating.

Forgive our foolish ways,
our thoughtless words,
our arrogant ignorance.
Help us to face the monsters within.
Turn our eyes once again to you,
and focus our hearts on your way,
that we may be faithful to your promise.

We pray in the name of the One
who is lifted up in the desert,
drawing all people to himself,
Jesus the Christ.

Eternal God,
by your word you create
and by your breath you give life.
We worship you with joy and thanksgiving,
praising you for the fullness
that your presence brings to our lives,
and our life together.
We praise you that by your word you feed us;
we are satisfied, and there is always more.
Your goodness is displayed in your wonderful works
for all humanity,
and in your perfect love.
In our humanity we are rebellious,
and sometimes follow after foolish ideas;
going ways which lead away from life with you . . .
And yet, when we cry out you are there,
your word healing our inner emptiness and pain,
embracing us, leading us in your life-giving ways.
For your unending faithfulness, revealed to us in Christ Jesus,
and made present to us in your Holy Spirit
we praise you, Lord God.

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: Romans 7:13-25

Hymn 79:

This day God gives me
strength of high heaven,
sun and moon shining,
flame in my hearth;
flashing of lightning,
wind in its swiftness,
deeps of the ocean,
firmness of earth.

This day God sends me
strength to sustain me,
might to uphold me,
wisdom as guide.
Your eyes are watchful,
your ears are listening,
your lips are speaking,
Friend at my side.

God's way is my way,
God's shield is round me,
God's host defends me,
saving from ill;
angels of heaven,
drive from me always
all that would harm me,
stand by me still.

Rising, I thank you,
mighty and strong one,
King of creation,
giver of rest,
firmly confessing
Threeness of Persons,
Oneness of Godhead,
Trinity blest.

Reading: John 2:13-22

Reflection:

Righteous indignation is a tricky thing. It is all too easy for indignation to grow into anger and then rage; and it is all too easy for righteous indignation to develop into *self* - righteous indignation. But that's what our theme is today in the story of the cleansing of the temple; a story describing Jesus' indignation boiling over into anger and even violence.

It takes place in one of the outer courtyards of the Temple in Jerusalem. The Temple was nothing like a modern synagogue or church. It was a very big complex, filled with buildings and courtyards. The whole purpose of the Temple was the offering of sacrifice to God. Offerings may have been made for individual families, and they were also made for communities and the whole nation.

Nowadays in church we bring our cash or debit card, and at the right moment, we solemnly make our offering discreetly, quietly, privately. Almost secretly. Temple offerings were much noisier and more public. Most offerings were alive when they reached the Temple. People who lived far away obviously couldn't bring their own animals. Animals were kept for sale in a compound in an outer part of the Temple. To buy a suitable offering, Roman money had to be exchanged for Temple money. Jesus knew that ordinary folk were being cheated in the holiest place on earth.

The word "sacrifice" originally meant, "to approach." people went to the temple to "approach" God, to come into God's presence, and to offer gifts which made them worthy to enter into "the courts of the Lord."

Some less than honest officials had seen a market opportunity and a chance to make a profit. Sacrifices were supposed to be without blemish, those who inspected the offering brought by local people, saw the opportunity to reject a sacrifice. This meant that a new animal had to be bought. There was a sales opportunity. Roman money was no good in the temple, and as money had to be exchanged, a further opportunity presented itself for corruption and greed. Seeing this

going on, Jesus got angry! For the one and only time in the Gospel stories, he seems to have lost his temper completely. Jesus picked up a whip and started to drive them all out - animals and moneychangers alike. .

Did Jesus lose his temper because the cheating was being done on holy ground? Or did Jesus lose his temper because the poor were being exploited in the name of religion? Both really.

In first-century Palestine no concept existed suggesting that Church and State were separate entities. It would be another 1,800 years before anyone really tried to keep the sacred and the secular apart. To Jesus, taking advantage of people in need was as bad if it occurred in the street or in the Temple. It didn't matter whether the offender was a tax collector or a Temple priest. Jesus took his whip to the crooks in the Temple to make a simple point. The Temple would be destroyed because those who controlled the religion of Israel had betrayed the people, the nation, and the nation's God.

Separation of Church and State may well be a good thing, but separating faith from daily life is not. St. Paul speaks to this dilemma in the lesson we read from Romans a few minutes ago. In one of his more intimate self-revelations, he admits that while he tries to be spiritual, something is going on within him that seems to make him do the very thing he hates. Paul constructs what might be called a "law of human nature." On the one hand, he delights in God's law, and on the other, he is drawn to do the things he ought not to do. The Temple priests and officials delighted in serving God and in keeping all the ritual and ceremonial laws. Yet they just couldn't resist the temptation to make some money on the side by exploiting those who were defenseless.

The irony of the Gospel story is that ordinary folk, realizing that they could not keep God's law, that they had broken that law, sought to approach God with a sacrifice in order to atone. They were being cheated at the point or place in their life where they should have been nurtured. Rather than merely reforming the system, slapping hands and telling the priests and their assistants to do better, Jesus called down judgment on them.

When we come between God and another human being we are "under judgment." If we let arrogance, or spite, hurt feelings, or sense of importance prevent another person from coming to God, we become like those whom Jesus chased out of the Temple. When we, as Christians, give support to those in the community who exploit those in need we become as those whom Jesus whipped out of the Temple.

Christianity is no easy thing. Being moral or ethical doesn't merely mean being *good*. We are also called to be just, and that is much harder. We are called to honour everyone and to use no one. That is much harder. If you sell insurance, own a shop, charge fees for services, rent out flats, you know how easy it is to exploit the gullible. St. Paul admits that although he delights in God's law, something inside him pulls him in another direction. Reading these words we, too, feel like we are personal battlegrounds between equal forces. Then Paul comes up with a wonderful truth. "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" he cries. The answer comes to him and almost overwhelms him. "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord," he shouts.

Week by week we hear God speak to us in the scripture readings, and we approach the God who is at his Table. We should know that we are in constant danger of becoming as cynical and blasé as those astonished moneychangers in the Temple who encountered, perhaps for the first time in their lives, the anger of God in the face of Jesus. That danger is part of the human condition and

there is perhaps little we can do about it other than to come to God and find acceptance and forgiveness; to come with the gift of our faithfulness, our love and our desire for justice. And God accepts us, forgives us, because, despite all our temptations, weaknesses and failures, we come with Jesus, hearing his word, following as best we can his example, and walking in his way. . By ourselves we are in constant danger of becoming both exploiters and the exploited. In Christ we are new beings, who accept all others because we have been made acceptable by him whose journey we share in this season of Lent.

Hymn 100:

O love of God, how strong and true,
eternal and yet ever new;
uncomprehended and unbought,
beyond all knowledge and all thought!

O love of God, how deep and great,
far deeper than our deepest hate;
self-fed, self-kindled like the light,
changeless, eternal, infinite.

O wide, embracing, wondrous love,
we read you in the sky above;
we read you in the earth below,
in seas that swell and streams that flow.

We read you best in him who came
to bear for us the cross of shame,
sent by the Father from on high,
our life to live, our death to die.

We read your power to bless and save
ev'n in the darkness of the grave;
still more in resurrection light
we read the fullness of your might.

O love of God, our shield and stay
through all the perils of our way;
eternal love, in you we rest,
for ever safe, for ever blest.

Communion:

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.

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**

Prayers for Others

Your love is patient;
we give you thanks for all those who have been patient with us
and have taught and cared for us;
and we pray for the patience to love others
as you have loved us.

Your love is kind;
give us the courage to be kind to others

and to serve those with patience
who are so often unkind, rude, difficult to love, or our enemies.
They are your children and our sisters and brothers
and they were made in your image.

Your love is not pompous;
give us insight to speak the truth in love
and for the sake of your kingdom
and not out of a need to appear clever or right
and in all our relationships
give us the wisdom to listen far more than we speak.

Your love does not seek its own interests;
we thank you and pray for those who serve the poor and those in need,
who give tirelessly of themselves and who have much to do
and little time for themselves.

Your love is not quick-tempered;
we pray for those who are angry
and for the violent and their victims;
for children who fear, elders who are abused,
and people trapped in relationships that injure and harm.

Your love bears all things;
we remember before you those with heavy burdens,
many cares, much stress, and too little comfort and help.
Open our eyes to those around us and their needs
and give us the wisdom to offer help
without any prying or sense of superiority.

Your love never fails;
even death does not trespass on the breadth and depth of your love.
We thank you for those we have loved in this life
and who now dwell in the peace and joy of your presence
and let your comfort settle on those who are bereaved
or who are lonely this day.

In the name of Jesus we pray.

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 600:
Christ is the world's Light, he and none other;
born in our darkness,
he became our Brother.

If we have seen him,
we have seen the Father:
Glory to God on high.

Christ is the world's Peace,
he and none other;
no one can serve him
and despise a brother.
Who else unites us,
one in God the Father?
Glory to God on high.

Christ is the world's Life,
he and none other;
sold once for silver,
murdered here, our Brother
he, who redeems us,
reigns with God the Father:
Glory to God on high.

Give God the glory,
God and none other;
give God the glory,
Spirit, Son and Father;
give God the glory,
God in Man my brother:
Glory to God on high.

Benediction:

May 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

