



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

Sunday Worship 28<sup>th</sup> April 2024

Call to Worship:

We worship the God who inhabits our world  
and indwells our lives.  
We need not look up to find God,  
we need only to look around:  
within ourselves,  
beyond ourselves,  
into the eyes of another.  
We need not listen for a distant thunder to find God,  
we need only listen to the music of life,  
the words of children,  
the questions of the curious,  
the rhythm of a heartbeat.  
We worship the God who inhabits our world  
and who indwells our lives.

Prayer/Meditation:

Let us give thanks for the remarkable gifts  
of God's creating and redeeming love,  
the loving that casts out all fear.

For the love that frees us to ask questions and explore,  
to frame doubts and investigate new possibilities,  
to build theories and then cross-examine them.  
*We thank you, God of adventurous love.*

For the love that enables us to marvel at our own existence,  
to ponder and remember,  
recognize our own needs  
and affirm our own knowledge and purpose.  
*We thank you, God of determined love.*

For the love that helps us to communicate with one another,  
to express trust and respect,  
share heartaches and visions,  
to convey love and mercy.  
*We thank you, God of reconciling love.*

For the love that inspires us to warmly encourage those around us,  
to affirm and build up, comfort and enlighten.

*We thank you, God of nurturing love.*

For the love that liberates us to celebrate the world around us  
in poetry and song,  
to delight in shapes and colours, intricacies and patterns,  
awesome forces and deep mysteries.

*We thank you God of visionary love.*

For the love that encourages us to express something of our faith;  
for creeds and prayers, hymns and readings,  
discussion groups and sermons.

*We thank you, God of creative love.*

Above all else we thank you  
for the love that allows us to admit  
that we have no words in which to adequately describe  
the process of faith in Christ,  
the awesome worship of our God,  
and the holy wonder of the Spirit.  
We thank you for that point where  
our love becomes wordless adoration.

Through Christ Jesus,  
who is the pure glory of your loving

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: 1 John 4:7-21

Hymn 610:

Beloved, let us love: for love is of God,  
in God alone has love its true abode.

Beloved, let us love: for they who love  
are born of God, his children from above.

Beloved, let us love: for love is rest,  
and they who have no love abide unblest.

Beloved, let us love: for love is light,  
and those who have no love dwell in the night.

Beloved, let us love: for only thus

shall we behold that God who first loved us.

Reading: John 15:1-8

Reflection:

Today's two scripture readings speak of a love that is pointing in two directions. In the letter of John there is the love of the members of the community for one another, and the letter stresses how vitally important that is. The love to which John calls us is neither easy nor romantic. It is not love merely "in word or speech, but in deed and in truth." It manifests itself in ways that may call for a kind of sacrifice— accepting back those who earlier had turned away, being open to those who live their lives in ways that we consider unorthodox - or even offensive - welcoming the stranger or those who are in any way threatened.

Such love, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is evidence of the presence of the risen Lord in the post-resurrection community, and that is the other direction in which love points. A love for God which binds us as close to Jesus as a vine to its branches.

Our reading today from the first letter of John emphasizes the bond that unites members of the community to one another, and the reading from the gospel according to John highlights the union of the members with Jesus himself. The metaphor of vine and branches vividly illustrates the intimate nature of the relationship between Jesus and his followers.

A vine is made up of its branches, and the life of the vine is the life of the branches. Jesus lives in his branches, and his branches live in Jesus.

The vine bears fruit through its branches, and the branches bear the fruit of the vine. As important as the branches are, the vine is not totally dependent on any one branch or group of branches. Therefore, it can endure pruning without withering and dying. But if there are no branches at all - there is no vine.

In the face of possible pruning, Jesus declares, "Remain in me, as I remain in you." Don't separate yourself from me; don't try to make it on your own; don't renounce your membership in me. You are not without a community; you are not without a source of life. We need to be a reconciling community, open to others and able to show the world that reconciliation with those who are unlike us; with those whose lives are repulsive to us; with those whom we think of as the enemies of the church; or the enemies of OUR faith - that reconciliation with THEM, is possible. In fact, is not only possible - it's what Jesus is asking of us; in fact it is what Jesus is calling us, through these scriptures, to do.

We will have to be a community bound to one another by love. Only then, will we be able to bring genuine love to a world eaten away by hatred. We ourselves will have to be the evidence of the presence of the risen Lord in our post-resurrection community.

Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. Without our faith, alive and reaching out and doing the work of the vine, bringing fruit to the vine, the vine will wither, and eventually die.

It is our job to bear the fruit of the vine - to make sure that we practice the teachings of Jesus - if we do that we will bear fruit - perhaps not necessarily the kind of fruit we were expecting - but nonetheless, we will bear fruit, and the vine will continue to grow and develop.

So when we see churches shrinking, if we think the Church is a dying branch of the vine, we don't worry too much about it, for it may be a sign of a pruning that ultimately strengthens the life of the vine, we just keep practicing the teaching of Jesus; keep trying to develop an open, non-judgmental community of love and acceptance - acceptance of the kind of people society loves to hate and we believe we will bear fruit, maybe a new kind of fruit, maybe fruit that is bitter at first, but fruit nonetheless: fruit of the spirit, fruit of the kingdom..

If our faith means anything at all then we must remember that God's way is not our way, but our way has to be the Lord's way. Amen.

Hymn 199

Jesus the Lord says, I am the bread.  
the bread of life for the world am I.  
The bread of life for the world am I,  
the bread of life for the world am I.  
Jesus the Lord says, I am the bread.  
the bread of life for the world am I.

Jesus the Lord says, I am the vine.  
the true and fruitful vine am I.  
The true and fruitful vine am I,  
the true and fruitful vine am I.  
Jesus the Lord says, I am the vine.  
the true and fruitful vine am I.

Jesus the Lord says, I am the way.  
the true and living way am I.  
The true and living way am I,  
the true and living way am I.  
Jesus the Lord says, I am the way.  
the true and living way am I.

Jesus the Lord says, I am the light.  
the one true light of the world am I.  
The one true light of the world am I,  
the one true light of the world am I.  
Jesus the Lord says, I am the light.  
the one true light of the world am I.

Jesus the Lord says, I am the life.  
the resurrection and the life am I.  
The resurrection and the life am I,  
the resurrection and the life am I.  
Jesus the Lord says, I am the life.  
the resurrection and the life am I.

Prayer:

Jesus Christ, the true vine,  
in our need we come to You,  
in weakness,  
needing Your strength  
for we too easily become dry and lifeless  
without Your life-giving spirit.

Jesus Christ, the true vine,  
teach us to remain in You  
and so to find Your life flowing in us

giving strength and vigour to our discipleship.

And as we come closer to You  
our lives are drawn closer to others.  
Our minds turn to images of violence we have seen on the news  
in places of fear and terror,  
to where people are at loggerheads,  
over race, religion, land, power.

Our thoughts turn to Christians living with persecution  
who face danger, simply for being linked to You.  
Father, prune back all that stands in the way of peace.

Our thoughts turn to people in leadership and power -  
who have decisions to make over the economy  
and people whose jobs and livelihood will be affected.  
We pray for our nation, and its leaders.  
May changes and choices be shaped by the values of the kingdom.

On our hearts are people in need in our church and community.  
Wherever hearts are breaking,  
bodies are failing,  
minds are confused  
families are ruptured:  
Lord, come with Your help and healing.

Here, too, as Your church gathered today,  
we give thanks for the saints of the past  
and the fruit they have borne in our community and beyond.  
Like them, help us to remain in You  
that we may be fruitful and bring glory to Your name.  
Through Jesus Christ, the true vine.

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.

Hymn 95

God is love, let heaven adore him;  
God is love: let earth rejoice;  
let creation sing before him,  
and exalt him with one voice.  
He who laid the earth's foundation,  
he who spread the heavens above.  
he who breathes through all creation,  
he is love, eternal love.

God is love, and is enfolding  
all the world in one embrace;

his unfailing grasp is holding  
every child of every race;  
and when human hearts are breaking  
under sorrow's iron rod,  
that same sorrow, that same aching  
wringings with pain the heart of God.

God is love: and though with blindness  
sin afflicts and clouds the will,  
God's eternal loving kindness  
holds us fast and guides us still.  
Sin and death and hell shall never  
o'er us final triumph gain;  
God is love, so Love for ever  
o'er the universe must reign.

Benediction

Let us love one another,  
because love is from God.  
Let us proclaim God's salvation to every generation.  
Let us remain in Jesus Christ,  
and like branches of a vine, draw our life from him.

And may God the vine grower tend us and make us fruitful;  
May Christ Jesus abide in us and give us life;  
And may the Holy Spirit cast out all fear and fill us with God's love.

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