

Christ Church and the Bridgwater Drive Church, 14 February 2021, Racial Justice Sunday

Music to start – Love divine, all loves excelling, verse 1

Welcome to the joint worship for Christ Church and The Bridgwater Drive Church. Today will be a Communion service so please have bread and wine or juice ready for us to share in the Lord's Supper each in our own homes. Today is also Racial Justice Sunday and with a few changes, I am using the material prepared by the URC Global and Intercultural Ministries team, it takes as its theme:

What kind of love?

As Racial Justice Sunday 2021 coincides with Valentine's Day the United Reformed Church's *Global and Intercultural Ministries* found themselves considering the theme 'What kind of love...?'

Questions that have bubbled up include:

- What kind of love does God call us to embody and demonstrate?
- What kind of love does the Church embody and enact?
- What kind of love enables injustice to continue and even flourish?
- What kind of love can engender change?
- What kind of love do oppressed and marginalised communities strive for?

Invitation to Worship:

More than an Invitation....

You have all been invited at this time to this special place

We don't just want an invitation

We want to be welcomed

You are offered a special welcome to this place at this time

We don't just want a welcome

We want to have a voice

Welcome to this place where there will be time for listening

We don't just want a voice

We want to be heard

Welcome to this friendly space where your story will be heard

We don't just want to be heard

We want to be believed

Welcome to this time and place where no-one's truth is denied

We don't just want to be believed

We want to be trusted

Welcome to this place and time where your words are accepted

We don't just want to be trusted

We want to be loved

Welcome to this time and place where God's love embraces everyone

We don't just want to be loved

We want to know we belong

Welcome, and we pray you will feel you belong among us at all times



Richard Becher

Today, as well as being designated Racial Justice Sunday, happens to be Valentine's Day. In other countries, for example the US, Valentine's Day is not about romantic love, but is a celebration of love in general and people send cards to both family members and friends. Many Latin American countries also have a day of love and friendship when they send messages of friendship to many people. And, as well as both those things, today's gospel reading is the story of the transfiguration! So all those themes will run throughout the service and we start with a hymn for Transfiguration Sunday about love, followed by a prayer from the URC Prayer Handbook about love.

Hymn Great God, your love has called us here (R&S 339) recorded by Thora

Great God, your love has called us here
as we, by love, for love were made.
Your living likeness still we bear,
though marred, dishonoured, disobeyed.
We come, with all our heart and mind
your call to hear, your love to find.

We come with self-inflicted pains
of broken trust and chosen wrong,
half-free, half-bound by inner chains,
by social forces swept along,
by powers and systems close confined,
yet seeking hope for humankind.

Great God, in Christ you call our name
and then receive us as your own,
not through some merit, right or claim,
but by your gracious love alone.
We strain to glimpse your mercy seat
and find you kneeling at our feet.

Then take the towel, and break the bread,
and humble us, and call us friends.
Suffer and serve till all are fed,
and show how grandly love intends
to work till all creation sings,
to fill all worlds, to crown all things.

Great God, in Christ you set us free
your life to live, your joy to share.
Give us your Spirit's liberty
to turn from guilt and dull despair
and offer all that faith can do
while love is making all things new.

© Brian Wren

Opening prayer

Loving God, in my thankfulness this day may I not overlook how frequently
your remarkable gift of love is found in actions that are small and commonplace.
May I receive love in a welcoming smile, and return it that way too;
may moments of patient waiting give time to hold others, fondly, in my thoughts;
may necessary journeys and routine tasks be seen as space and time to think, pray and give;
may I learn afresh that love in practice need not be always worthy and purposeful
but sometimes may be frivolous and fun! **Amen**

Prayer of Confession

God of justice and forgiveness, we confess that we live in a world
in which some are hungry even for bread,
many people are sad or hurt, and there is much that is unfair and unjust.
We confess that in our own lives we do not always do what is right
or turn away from what is wrong.
We ask your forgiveness, we claim your love and mercy,
and we ask for courage to make a new beginning. In the name of Jesus Christ. **Amen**

Christ Jesus came into the world to forgive sinners. To all who turn to him, he says: 'Your sins are forgiven.' He also says: 'Follow me.' Amen

Offertory

You are reminded to send in your gifts for the work of the church by cheque or bank transfer.

God, receive these gifts by your grace.

Multiply and use them through the power of the Holy Spirit
to accomplish Christ's work of love in the world. **Amen.**

Bible reading: Mark 9:2-9

Reflection by Zaidie Orr

Transfiguration in the Valley

Martin Luther King Jr. Day was the 18th Jan 2021... and I wonder what he would have made of the current situation in the USA? We have a saying in the Caribbean - when someone has died and then something happens with which they would not be happy, 'they would be turning in their grave'. I am certain that Martin would be turning in his grave - but I believe he would also want us to continue to strive for racial justice.

I am not sure how many of us know the history of this memorable day. The initial request was made in 1983, but it was not celebrated until 1986, and it wasn't until 2000 that the day was observed in all the states of the USA. Even in death, the striving for justice continued.

One of Martin Luther King Jr's well-known speeches is his 'I have been to the mountain top'. In this speech he talks about longevity, but this was not his concern - he just wanted to do God's will. He felt that God had shown him the Promised Land, and he wanted the crowd to know that though he may not get there with them, as a people, we *will* get to the Promised Land. Today, I want to echo that message, wherever there is racial injustice.

Our Gospel reading for this Racial Justice Sunday is the Transfiguration, found in Mark 9:2-9. The reading tells us about Jesus and his three disciples going up the mountain to pray. While they were there, the disciples fell asleep. (As we read the rest of the Gospels, we learn that they had a habit of falling asleep at some really important moments!) They were awoken by the sound of Jesus talking – and, as they looked, they saw Jesus transformed right there in front of their eyes.

Like Peter, most of us would like to stay on the mountaintop – in that wondrous space, far from the trials of reality - but we know that there is work to be done in the valley, where we truly encounter life in all its complexity. So today, on this special Sunday, let us recommit ourselves to the journey, the striving, the determination to simply do God's will. Let the words and thoughts we share today be a source of challenge and encouragement for all of us to shine the light of the transfiguration (*revelation*) on places where racial injustice reigns. Let us live as if we are still on the mountaintop, gazing at Jesus transfigured before us. May that vision be our unending source of hope as we journey down to where Jesus calls us, knowing that he is with us in all things.

Our lives are so much more than we experience through our senses. God, in Christ, gives us purpose and light – the ability to live our lives for others. The mountaintop experience is not about building tents to protect and contain what we have been given; the light of Christ is not for keeping to ourselves – these are gifts to be shared; gifts which can illumine the issues which divide our communities, our nations and our world today. Gifts which can help bring transformation – right here, in the valley, where we live and love and seek God's will.

Today, as individuals and churches, let us focus our worship, prayers, reflections and actions on recognising and naming 'racial injustice'. Let us be strengthened and emboldened by the mountaintop experience. And let us, in company with Jesus, strive tirelessly until we can truly say, 'All Lives Matter', because Black people and the people of Myanmar, UK, China, Africa, Asia and Palestine All Matter.

Prayer - Richard Becher

Lord, turn me inside out,
so people can see
the You in me
with the same shape heart,
the same colour of blood
and one word in our flesh
that makes us like You
revealing the image of God
in our coats of many colours.
Lord, I love from the inside
what I see on the outside
so may we love what we see
and be loved for who we are:
brothers and sisters,
united from inside out
to turn the world upside down!

Poem by Helma Cardoso

Bound by Acceptance

From my head to my feet,
What I see and what I miss.
Through my eyes I see imperfections
all around.
I hide my face and brace myself for opinions
and judgments
I question what I can change, yet the change
is impossible.
We live in a world where others tell us our
Imperfections
Before we ever thought we had any.
But no!
What I truly see is me –
From my complexion to my emotions –
Because God didn't create me with flaws and
Imperfections.
The world did.

Hymn What are the reparations? © Ray Stanyon https://youtu.be/1ecVc8_8IE
written for Racial Justice Sunday 2021 (we listened to this last week before and after the service)

It seems that God's creation is not what was designed.
So easy to accept things and then become resigned
To never being different, wrongs ne'er to be repaired
Will ever come the time when your bounty's fairly shared?

We see the world around us now lost and full of sin
What we bemoan in others too often found within
My heart as cold as any, my thoughts for self alone
Where are the seeds of hope that in me you've freely sown?

What are the reparations that we must make today?
What words and deeds can ever right wrongs of yesterday-
Life stolen, stunted, ended – in anger, hurt and pain.
How can we hope to ever Walk side by side again?

“Act justly and love mercy, walk humbly with your God!”
Still challenges us to action – to walk the way you trod,
To join you in your journey, to usher in your reign,
Share grace with broken-hearted, and live with healing pain

You are the generous sower – who still throws out your seed
For some the source of sharing, for others source of greed
Turn inward thoughts now outward, as equals let us stand
In brokenness and sorrow – still guided by your hand

Bible reading: Galatians 3:28

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

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I am mindful of the fact that we live in communities that are predominantly white, so there is little we can do in the local context to combat racism and discrimination, beyond speaking out against discrimination and encouraging a community of inclusive welcome of all. I share some extracts from the URC sermon for today by Rev'd Melanie Smith. If you wish to read the whole thing it can be found here: <https://ctbi.org.uk/rjs-2021-resources/>

How do we, in the United Reformed Church, reflect this multicultural vision of the Body of Christ? On an institutional level, it seems fair to say that we have adopted many policies and procedures to ensure that we have the tools to recognise and weed out racism when we see it.

After being established by the 1996 General Assembly, our Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry colleagues have produced many resources, from helping churches audit how they welcome diversity and how as a church we portray diversity. There is a network of Racial Justice Advocates in the Synods. Yet, we have only had one General Assembly Moderator and one Synod Moderator who have been from BAME communities in the whole life of the URC.

So, can the United Reformed Church claim that we have really recognised what racism looks like and have we gone far enough to eradicate it? On this Racial Justice Sunday, the world is in turmoil over Black Lives Matter, the legacies of slavery, the violent divisions in the USA running along distinct racial lines, and we in the UK have much to do to tackle the inequalities exposed by the coronavirus pandemic. With that struggle being real in the communities in which we are grounded, it is no surprise that the URC has not yet arrived at a place of full racial justice.

As the people of God, we are people in the world. We strive to live up to our holy calling as the Body of Christ, but our calling is not easy. Our holy calling takes us up mountains in the fog, to terrifying places, where we listen to strange, unfamiliar voices, saying things beyond our comprehension. We are called to set aside our usual customs and practices.

Our world has been bruised and battered in this past year. Added to the fears of the climate crisis, the situation we're in can be bewildering for those of us who have previously led stable lives; it may feel like these issues are almost too great to contemplate. Yet, there is no way to deny the truth which we know now; exposing historical injustices gives us the opportunity to tackle those injustices like never before. We have to acknowledge that we still have a mountain to climb; but climb it we must. We must set aside our old certainties and risk our comforts to join God on that mountaintop.

Listen to the call of Jesus, follow him. Like Jesus, call out injustices, prejudice and falsehoods when you see them. Challenge the systems which enslave and keep people down. As Jesus listened to and helped people who were ignored and excluded, listen to and help those in our churches who are ignored and excluded. And challenge the church until it reflects the Body of Christ. Amen

Lord's Supper

We are gathered here not because we have seen fit to choose Christ, but because he has looked upon us and called us to be his own.

The joy of those who hear the call of Christ be with you all.

And also with you.

Let us celebrate this joyful feast.

People will come from east and west and north and south,
and sit at table in the kingdom of God.

Loving God, the world you made is beautiful and full of wonder.

You made us, with all your creatures, and you love all that you have made.

You gave us the words of your prophets, the stories of your people throughout the generations, and the gathered wisdom of many years.

You gave us Jesus, your Son, to be born and to grow up
in difficult times where there was little peace.
He embraced people with your love and told stories to change us all.
He healed those in pain and brought to life those who had lost hope.
He made friends with anyone who would listen and loved even his enemies.
For these things, he suffered.
For these things, he died.
And he was raised from death and lives with you forever.
You give us your Holy Spirit, to teach and to strengthen us,
to remind us of Jesus Christ and to make us one in him.
For all these gifts we thank you, and join with all your people
on earth and in heaven, in joyful praise, saying:

Holy, holy, holy Lord
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.
This is the mystery of faith:
Christ took the form of a slave
Christ took the cross of shame
Christ gives the free gift of life.

Send your Holy Spirit upon this bread and wine,
and upon your people, that Christ may be with us,
and we may be ready to live for you
and do what you ask of us, today and every day to come. **Amen**

On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body which is broken 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. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Sharing of bread and wine

Prayer after communion

Most gracious God, we thank you for what you have given us.
You have fed us with the bread of life and renewed us for your service.
Now we give ourselves to you, and ask that our daily living
may be part of the life of your kingdom,
and that our love may be your love
reaching out into the life of the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Prayers of intercession

Gracious God, we pray today for unity and equality and an end to discrimination and prejudice of all kind. Help us to truly remember that in Christ we are all one.
Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray today, for all those who go hungry and for the people who help them, through volunteering at foodbanks, by donating food and money, or by speaking out and raising awareness of issues.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for scientists and all those working to deliver vaccines, for doctors, nurses, porters and cleaners, carers and their families, as they battle tiredness and depression to keep going.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

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We pray for world leaders and democratic systems. Let them not be abused and help us not to be overtaken by apathy and despair when it seems that democracy is flawed. Especially this week, we pray for the people of Myanmar and Hong Kong.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for those who feel lonely and sad, locked in their homes again, not able to see family or friends. And for all those who have had COVID-19 or lost a loved one to the virus.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for all those who are ill and those who care for them; for those awaiting test results or treatment, for the dying and those who mourn. May your infinite love and grace surround them and bring them peace, in Jesus' name. **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn Christian Love, written for last year's Racial Justice Sunday © John Campbell

Christian love is not romantic,
not soft-focussed, twee or sweet,
Christian love's not 'likes', nor dating,
far more real than text or tweet.
Christian love means life-long struggle;
lived-out kindness ev'rywhere.
Christian love must echo Jesus:
selfless, soulful, steeped in prayer.

Christian love cries out for justice
wheresoever it's denied;
joins the struggle, makes the protest,
stays the course, eyes open wide.
Christian love rejects what's racist,
sexist, ageist, prejudiced,
turns against each nurtured bias,
learning daily to resist.

Christian love respects the other,
seeks to understand, not judge;
takes delight in mutual learning
doesn't force and doesn't fudge.
Christian love's an arduous journey,
finding self by giving all;
serving, sharing, helping, caring;
full response to Jesus' call.

Christian love is learned from Jesus,
walks his way and bears his cross;
self-surrenders, like our Saviour;
gains much more than what is lost.
Christian love is so persistent,
it outlasts all other things;
by its hope, its faith, its struggle,
it's the song all heaven sings!

Blessing

May God's grace and love fill the earth and also our hearts
May justice flow like a roaring, mighty river
May peace descend like a dove upon quiet waters
And may we be mindful always
That in God's Kingdom
All are loved to overflowing. Amen.

Hymns used under the Christ Church CCLI licence 63352