

Call to worship (inspired by Psalm 98, written for the URC Jubilee worship)

Sing aloud for joy!

The Power within and beyond, the Presence throughout,
the Wonder and the Glory call for nothing less
than the full expression of all that we are and all that we have.

There is no place on earth or in the heavens
that has not been soaked in, tickled or teased by Divine Love.

There is no living creature on earth or in the heavens
that has not been marked, grazed or embraced by the Divine Kiss.

There is no song too lowly or too grand
to offer in praise and thanksgiving.

Bring your instruments: lift Your voices.
Match the roar of the oceans and the majesty of the mountains.
Let all things magnify Holy might. Let all things reflect Holy light.

Nothing is apart from, and all is a part of,
God whose immensity, mercy and justice are forever.

Revd Carla A. Grosch-Miller, *Psalms redux: Poems and prayers* (Canterbury Press, 2014), used with permission, extract

Hymn O Lord my God, R&S 117

O Lord my God when I in awesome wonder
consider all the works thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
thy power throughout the universe displayed;

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,
how great thou art, how great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,
how great thou art, how great thou art!*

When through the woods and forest glades I wander
and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
and hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze:
Then sings my soul...

But when I think that God, his Son not sparing,
sent him to die – I scarce can take it in
that on the cross, our burden gladly bearing,
he bled and died to take away our sin:
Then sings my soul...

When Christ shall come with shouts of acclamation
and take me home – what joy shall fill my heart!
Then shall I bow in humble adoration
and there proclaim, 'my God, how great thou art!'
Then sings my soul...

Children's Time

Gifts

Gracious God, receive these gifts that represent our love for you and our commitment to act for justice. May they reflect the self-sacrifice spoken of by Queen Elizabeth and be used boldly as we join efforts to 'defeat the evils of our time' and bring about your kingdom. Amen.

Hymn Let me walk in love beside you, lyrics by the Revd Ray Stanyon Tune: Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult

Let us walk in love beside you
All along life's dusty road
Hearing, knowing every burden
Let us help to share your load

Wounds and pain arise to rob us
Of a love community
Guard us from a self-importance
Seeing you as less than 'we'

Let us rise and risk for justice
Walk a mile within your shoes
Striving for a world that's far too
Precious in God's eyes to lose

Whether sitting or if active
May we always do what's best
God the focus of attention
God our source, our work, our rest

Revd Ray Stanyon (URC ordained Minister) serves Wessex Synod; Words © RNC Stanyon 2019, used with permission

Children leave for Sunday Club – we say the Grace

Reading from the Prophet Micah 6.6-8 The Inclusive Bible version

'What shall I bring when I come before God,
and bow down before God on high?' you ask.
'Am I to come before God with burnt offerings? With year-old calves?
Will God be placated by thousands of rams, or ten thousand rivers of oil?
Should I offer my firstborn for my wrongdoings--
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?'
Listen here, mortal, God has already made abundantly clear what 'good' is,
and what God needs from you: simply do justice, love kindness, and humbly walk with your God.

Prayer of Confession

As we prepare to confess our sins, may we be enlightened by the words of Queen Elizabeth, from her 1984 Christmas message: 'Above all, we must retain the child's readiness to forgive, with which we are all born and which it is all too easy to lose as we grow older. Without it, divisions between families, communities and nations remain unbridgeable. We owe it to our children and grandchildren to live up to the standards of behaviour and tolerance which we are so eager to teach them.... We should work to heal old wounds and to abandon prejudice and suspicion.'

Queen Elizabeth, Christmas 1984 (p 42-43 in *The Servant Queen: and the King she serves*, by Mark Greene & Catherine Butcher, published by Bible Society, HOPE, LICC, 2016)

Merciful God, we approach you asking for forgiveness,
For healing and reconciliation
To once again feel the power of your Love.
As individuals and as a nation we have tempted fate.
We have not simply done justice and loved kindness.

We have stretched our grasp with greed.
We have protected our privacy with isolationism.
We have ravaged your creation with entitlement.
Forgive us.
As we are forgiven, may we,
with the readiness of a child, forgive others.
Those who have caused division and pain
Those who spread intolerance and prejudice
Those who destroy that which we try to build up.
Open our hearts to abandon prejudice and suspicion.
As we teach our children tolerance, may we be tolerant.
Use us to restore harmony
That all may humbly walk with you
And feel the power of your love.
This we pray in the name of the great healer, Jesus. Amen

Assurance of grace

'Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian faith. It can heal broken families; it can restore friendships and it can reconcile divided communities. It is in forgiveness that we feel the power of God's love.'

Queen Elizabeth, 2011 (p.42 in in *The Servant Queen: and the King she serves*, by Mark Greene & Catherine Butcher, published by Bible Society, HOPE, LICC, 2016

God of all, how kind you are to your people,
for you forgive our sins
and are gentle with our shortcomings.
You hold back your displeasure
and your anger never lasts for long.
It is what we need, this ever-present love
and your saving hand when trouble comes.
We are listening to what you say,
especially your promise that peace will come
when we turn from our foolish ways,
then Love and Loyalty will hold hands,
Justice and Peace will embrace.
Even as we turn to find you,
we find assurance knowing that
you are looking upon us now. Amen

Revd Duncan Wilson (URC ordained Minister) writes contemporary versions of psalms for his project 'Praise from the heart: The Psalms in liturgical order'. Used with permission

Hymn Love alone lyrics by Revd Stephen Best Tune: *Blaenwern*

Any words which we may utter,
Without love to reach their goal,
Are no more than clashing cymbals,
Empty gongs without a soul.
Though we conjure future visions,
Understand life's wherewithal,
And have faith which moves the mountains,
Without love we are not whole.

Acts of charitable giving
And the self-denial call,
If such actions have no loving,
we gain nothing from them all.
Love is patient, love is kindness,
Knows no envy does not boast,
Bends itself to others' pathways,
Hopes, believes and endures all.

Everything has its own season,
Children once, we now stand tall.
In adulthood still our vision
Through dark mirrors captures all.
While we search for understanding,
Faith and hope and love still call,
And in future generations,
Love alone will outlive all.

Revd Stephen Best (URC ordained Minister) serving the Cardiff and Penarth URC Pastorate, Wales. Inspired by 1 Corinthians 13. Used with permission

Bible reading: Romans 12. 1-6 NRSV

Today's first reading from the New Testament is taken from Paul's letter to the people of Rome, a reading that was also read at the 2012 Royal Jubilee service (v 1-18). Whether you are a royalist or a republican with no time for the royal family, today, among other things we celebrate 70 years of the Queen's service to the nation. I'm not going to talk about any other members of the family, but the Queen has indeed given a lifetime of service. She said, when she first became queen, that whether her life was short or long that it would be one of service, and I believe it has been. And on a personal level, we should remember that every anniversary of her becoming queen is also a reminder of her father's death.

It is interesting that this passage from Romans was chosen for the 50th Jubilee and we are reading it again today: Paul writes: 'I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.' I find it an interesting choice because in some respects the queen is higher than us; she certainly has a life and lifestyle like no other person in the country, and maybe in the world, as the world's longest serving monarch, but I wonder does she see herself as higher, or simply as different? Her life has been one of service, albeit wrapped in a life of luxury, of good food, wealth and the very best private health care. And her faith has always been the foundation of her life and service. She is not only the head of the Church of England in name, she lives by her faith in a way that could be an example to us all. She says - 'I know just how much I rely on my faith to guide me through the good times and the bad. Each day is a new beginning. I know that the only way to live my life is to try to do what is right, to take the long view, to give of my best in all that the day brings, and to put my trust in God...I draw strength from the message of hope in the Christian gospel.'

-- Queen Elizabeth, 2002 (p.6 in *The Servant Queen*, by Mark Greene & Catherine Butcher)

In her 1975 Christmas message, the Queen said, 'His [Jesus's] simple message of love has been turning the world upside down ever since. He showed that what people are and what they do, does matter and does make all the difference.... It does matter therefore what each individual does each day. Kindness, sympathy, resolution and courteous behaviour are infectious. Acts of courage and

5 June 2022 The Queen's Platinum Jubilee, & Church Anniversary, with Wedding Anniversaries

self-sacrifice ...are an inspiration to others. And the combined effect can be enormous.... We may feel powerless alone, but the joining efforts of individuals can defeat the evils of our time.'

(p.49 in *The Servant Queen*, by Mark Greene & Catherine Butcher)

Paul tells us, 'For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us' Let us exercise those gifts for our church, our community, our nation, and above all to bring in God's kingdom here and now.

Hymn Spirit of God unseen as the wind (tune Skye Boat Song, CH600) Sung by Thora

*Spirit of God, unseen as the wind,
gentle as is the dove;
teach us the truth and help us believe,
show us the Saviour's love!*

You spoke to us long, long ago,
gave us the written word;
we read it still, needing its truth
through it God's voice is heard.

Chorus:

Without your help we fail our Lord,
we cannot live His way;
we need Your power, we need Your strength,
following Christ each day.

Chorus:

Today we are not only celebrating a national jubilee, and the church anniversary, and wedding anniversaries, today is also Pentecost the day we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit to the early Christians and so we hear that story from Acts now:

Bible reading: Acts 2:1-8, 12-13

With some amendments, this reflection, is mostly the sermon prepared by the Revd Ruth Whitehead, Moderator of Southwestern Synod for today's URC Daily Devotions Worship.

In addition to the reading from Acts, she took as her other biblical text, the story of the tower of Babel from Genesis.

'The Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. And the Lord said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech." So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth.'

We have heard two strange stories – of the tower of Babel and the coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The first story sees God mixing up people's languages and scattering them – the second sees God sending the Holy Spirit to bring people back together again.

5 June 2022 The Queen's Platinum Jubilee, & Church Anniversary, with Wedding Anniversaries

We might read the tower of Babel story as a story about human pride being nipped in the bud by God. The people are united in wanting to 'make a name for themselves' and build their tower – God comes down and confuses their language and they are scattered and leave off building the city. Try reading the story in this way when your church is next planning a major building project – just as we are here in Rayleigh! For whose benefit is that building – is it glorifying God or the building committee?

But Babel is the same Hebrew word that gets translated as 'Babylon' throughout the rest of Hebrew scripture. So, then we might read this story as one in which God condemns the empire of Babylon, and any other power on earth that will impose its language on an occupied people.

Try reading the story in this way as you hear news of invasions and occupations.

Or there is a third understanding, we might remember that God tells Noah and his sons, just two chapters earlier in Genesis, to spread out and fill all corners of the earth. This settling and building of a tower and being entirely monocultural and static is contrary to God's will of spreading out and embracing the difference of the whole world that is out there. Try reading the story in this way when you are wondering whether you have the energy to change, or move, or re-think how to do church, just as we are doing now, here in Rayleigh.

But if instead of 'What on earth is going on?' we ask 'What is God doing?' – especially 'What is the God of love doing?' we might read the story differently.

The story of the tower of Babel is often thought of as a myth which explains why there are so many languages on earth – but it is a strange idea that God is peeved and annoyed at these uppity humans and their tall tower, so decides to punish them with diversity and confusion and many different languages. How can they possibly get along, let alone organise themselves into building something worthwhile, if they don't even speak the same language? And yet, watch a group of little children playing when they come from different cultures and speak different languages, or when they are too young to have much language - they cope, they find a common sense of fun and play and concern which supersedes diversity of language.

What is God doing? What is the God of love doing? - What if we read the story instead, assuming that God is not annoyed and irritated but loving and wanting the best for people. There is a whole rich world to enjoy, and it feels like the human tribe – just speaking one language – has got stuck. "Let's build a tower and make a name for ourselves", they say. You can imagine the planning committee saying 'when we're gone, people will see the tower and know we were here – in fact we could put a plaque on it. We could raise money by inviting people to have their names on a brick...'. The God of love doesn't want people to get trapped in projects and small-mindedness: God wants people to be fruitful and multiply and explore the whole earth. Maybe the mix up of languages was meant to make people curious about the world, embracing diversity and wanting to explore and expand their horizons. The God of love does not want uniformity and oppression and narrowness... the God of love does not want building projects for the sake of building projects or simply to make essential repairs, the God of love wants building projects for mission – to break out of narrow-

5 June 2022 The Queen's Platinum Jubilee, & Church Anniversary, with Wedding Anniversaries

mindedness and the way we have always done things and explore and interact with the community and the world around us.

And so, we come to the events of the Day of Pentecost. What on earth is going on there?

That's the question on the lips of the crowd of 'devout Jews from every nation' living in Jerusalem.

They hear the disciples speaking about God's deeds of power in their own languages. This is not an example of people speaking in tongues, but a common language of love which has to be interpreted by another – there is diversity of language here, not commonality. So what is the God of love doing?

God is enabling the message of love, shown in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, to be shared with everyone and anyone. God's love is not for one people, one language, one place – it is for everyone and everywhere, and the Holy Spirit provides the energy and equipment for the

Good News to be shared. God's love is meant to be messy, diverse, varied, prodigal...it is for scattering and sharing. It seems that the message of the tower of Babel and the message of the Spirit's coming at Pentecost are not opposites at all, where one scatters, and the other brings back together. Both stories are about scattering and sharing.

The God of love empowers the young church with the Holy Spirit, to go and tell all the world about the love of Jesus. And the God of love continues to empower the church to be the messy, diverse, varied people who will be united in purpose – to invite everyone to the feast of life. Amen

Hymn Refresh our lives lyrics by Sam Goodman (URC)
Tune: *Was lebet was schwebet, O worship the Lord in the beauty of Holiness*

Refresh our lives bring us back to this Holy place
Where we feel held in the love that you show
Let mercy flow, hold us tenderly in your grace
Build up your church let our love for you grow

Restore in our lives that great spark that you gave to us
Relight the fire that once burned in our hearts
Challenge us daily to trust you to strengthen us
Use us to serve, let your miracles start

Revive us with water that won't make us thirst again
Deepen our longing to seek for the truth
Kindle our yearning to put your way first again
Give us the courage to stand up for you

Redeem your people and gather the wanderers
Comfort the mourners, replenish our love
Bring us your hope, only you can deliver us
Guide us with patience to wait on your call

Rejoice with the spirit, the sanctuary fills with praise
Come here with joy, let God's name be proclaimed
Let love rebound from songs and psalms that we raise
Hold in our hearts the full awe of God's name

Litany of Thanksgiving & Prayers of intercession

God of Creation, Designer of sameness and diversity,
of time and eternity, we give you thanks and praise.

Today we especially pray for Queen Elizabeth.

In this year of Jubilee, grant her your gifts of love, joy and peace
as she continues in faithful obedience to you, her God,

and in devoted service to the people of these islands, and those of the Commonwealth.

Illuminate her path that she may walk in your way, now and all the days of her life. Amen

Today as we celebrate the life and service of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the 112th anniversary of this church and the many silver, golden and diamond wedding anniversaries celebrated by members of the congregation during the pandemic and this year. Please join me in a responsive litany of thanksgiving. When I say 'God over all,' please respond saying '**we give you thanks**'

God over all, **we give you thanks.**

God our source, our work our rest,

We give thanks for nations and leaders around the world.

God over all, **we give you thanks.**

We give thanks for Her Majesty's reign of seventy years

and the example of a life symbolised by duty and sustained by faith.

God over all, **we give you thanks.**

We give thanks for all the citizens of this nation, all created in your image.

God over all, **we give you thanks.**

We give thanks for the steadfast witness of the Christian Church

and of communities of faith here and around the world. And in particular today, for the 112 years of Christian witness in this place as the Congregational and then United Reformed Church.

God over all, **we give you thanks.**

In this its 50th anniversary year, we give thanks for the United Reformed Church, all its ministers, elders and leaders, its members and young people.

God over all, **we give you thanks.**

We give thanks for your love and grace in the lives of the couples who have celebrated significant wedding anniversaries, recognised in our order of service today.

God over all, **we give you thanks.**

We give thanks also for the other couples of this congregation who have been faithful together for many years but have not yet reached a number our society recognises as significant. We give thanks for those couples whose long marriages were cut short by death, and we give thanks and ask your blessing on weddings to come in the rest of this jubilee year.

God over all, **we give you thanks.**

We give thanks that we can gather in our diversity and celebrate all these joyous events today.

God over all, **we give you thanks. Amen.**

God, in whose likeness all are made, teach us to see each other
as you see us – each individual, nation and people – beautiful and beloved.

God, who is love, teach us to love each other as you love us -

from the very heart of who we are, embracing friend, embracing neighbour, embracing stranger.

God, who is impartial, teach us to strive as you strive -

raging with the oppressed, unsettling the comfortable, refusing to be stilled

or quieted until your cries for justice are heard, and echoed, and lived into being.

Stir us to be agents of challenge and change.

God of justice, who demands justice,

move us from the inactive, safe, silent, place on the fence.

Open our eyes. Move us to listen. Make us hear. Speak out and speak up.

Struggle and move and act for justice - right now - in our world, our nation, our Church - today.

Amen.

Amended from the prayer written by Revd Karen Campbell, URC Secretary for Global & Intercultural Ministries.

Lord's Prayer

Hymn God Save the Queen (2 verses)

God save our gracious Queen!
Long live our noble Queen!
God save the Queen!
Send her victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us,
God save the Queen.

Thy choicest gifts in store
On her be pleased to pour,
Long may she reign.
May she defend our laws,
And ever give us cause,
To sing with heart and voice,
God save the Queen.

Blessing

Let us put our hands into the hand of God and go out with joy
Awakened to the treasure within and around us,
To bring transformation, challenge and hope to the world.
And may the abundant blessings of God,
Source, Saviour and Spirit
Be ours today and always. Amen.

Revd Cara Heafey (URC ordained Minister) serving at Summertown URC and Chaplain in the Oxford Hospitals.

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