

**Call to worship** (inspired by Psalm 24)

'The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it.'

Everything belongs to the Lord God.

**The world and all living things.**

By God's grace we stand in God's presence.

**Through Christ we are washed clean.**

Open wide doors of your hearts again,

**that the King of glory may come in.**

Let us worship God Almighty –

**the King of glory.**

**Hymn** All creatures of our God and King R&S39 omit vs 5 & 6

All creatures of our God and king,

lift up your voice and with us sing

Alleluia, alleluia!

Thou burning sun with golden beam,

thou shining moon with silver gleam,

*O praise him, O praise him,*

*Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!*

Thou rushing wind that art so strong,

ye clouds that sail in heaven along,

O praise him, alleluia!

Thou rising morn, in praise rejoice,

ye lights of evening find a voice;

*O praise him ...*

Thou flowing water, pure and clear,

make music for thy Lord to hear,

Alleluia, alleluia!

Thou fire so masterful and bright

that givest us both warmth and light,

*O praise him ...*

Dear mother earth, who day by day

unfoldest blessings on our way,

O praise him, alleluia!

The flowers and fruits that in thee grow,

let them his glory also show;

*O praise him ...*

Let all things their creator bless

and worship him in humbleness,

O praise him, alleluia!

Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,

and praise the Spirit, Three-in-One,

*O praise him ...*

W.H. Draper

**Children's Time** – intro from 'Celebrate Together'

Today we are also celebrating Harvest – 'food' from 'Celebrate Together'

**Gifts** (Harvest for Wateraid) + **Harvest gifts for Hopeworx & HARP**

God, who created our wonderful planet.

We thank you for the abundant resources that the world provides.

At this harvest time we especially thank you for the food that we eat and the water that is needed to grow our food, to wash our food, to cook our food and to wash up afterwards.

We pray for the work of WaterAid as they seek to ensure everyone, everywhere has access to the water they need.

We also pray for the work of Hopeworx and HARP and commend these gifts to your glory. Amen

**Hymn** Jubilate, everybody R&S 713 sung twice

Jubilate everybody,

serve the Lord in all your ways,

and come before his presence singing

enter now his courts with praise.

For the Lord our God is gracious,

and his mercy's ever lasting.

Jubilate, jubilate, jubilate Deo!

Psalm 100, Fred Dunn

## We say the Grace as children leave for Sundayclub

**Introduction** to the Jubilee – URC worship materials

### Prayer of praise

Creator God, we praise you for your love, and delight in your creation, thanking you for the generosity with which you bless us each day. For the world and all living things that you have created, we give glory to your name.

Saving God, we praise you that your love for us was poured out in Christ, whose life and example reveal the nature of untainted humanity in perfect union with the divine. We praise you, that through Christ's death and resurrection, you have redeemed us so that all things in creation may be reconciled to you.

Liberating God, we praise you for the true freedom that is found in Christ – freedom to be what you created us to be. We praise you for your deep love and care for the poor and those unjustly treated and for calling us to share your love and passion for freedom for all.

God of joy and peace, you are worthy of all praise and glory, so today we lift our hearts and voices with thanksgiving and sing praise for your faithfulness and love in the work and life of the United Reformed Church in this year of jubilee. Take us, remake us, and challenge us with a Spirit-filled, world transforming call, to bring freedom and love wherever you call us to be and in whatever work you require of us as we look to the future with hope. Amen.

### Hymn For the beauty of the earth R&S 41

For the beauty of the earth  
for the beauty of the skies  
for the love which from our birth  
over and around us lies

*Gracious God, to thee we raise  
this our sacrifice of praise*

For the beauty of each hour  
of the day and of the night  
hill and vale and tree and flower  
sun and moon and stars of light

For the joy of ear and eye,  
for the heart and mind's delight  
for the mystic harmony  
linking sense to sound and sight.

For the joy of human love,  
brother, sister, parent, child,  
friends on earth, and friends above;  
for all gentle thoughts and mild:

For each perfect gift of thine  
to our race so freely given  
graces human and divine  
flowers of earth and buds of heaven

For thy people, evermore  
lifting holy hands above,  
offering up on every shore  
their pure sacrifice of love

F.S. Pierpoint

### **Bible readings:      Leviticus 25:8-12, 18-19                                  Luke 4:16-21**

In Leviticus 25, the theme and purpose of jubilee is established as law and guidance for God's chosen people. The people are given these guidelines as they about to enter the land promised to them, after they have wandered in the desert for 40 years. As the people observe the Sabbath every seventh day, so the land is to observe a sabbath every seventh year. The people are instructed to sow and harvest only for six years. In the seventh year the land shall have a complete rest. They are not to sow, plough, reap or harvest, but to live only off what the land naturally gives, or what they have stored in the previous six years. At

the end of seven times seven years, they are to declare a jubilee and the year will be sacred. Again, they are not to sow or harvest, but live off what has been stored before. Land is returned to its owner, slaves and indentured servants are set free, and debts are erased. Jubilee is about justice. It was a programme of social justice and reform. It re-sets what ever has happened in the previous 49 years, returning things back to the way God intended. In the mindset of Leviticus and the ancient Israelites, the earth and everything in it belonged to God. The people are merely tenants. We take care of the earth for God, but the land belongs to God; it does not belong to us.

In our text from Luke, Jesus is at the very start of his ministry, and he reads from the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah takes up the theme of jubilee from Leviticus and extends it to reflect more widely on freedom, considering captivity and freedom in a more literal physical sense and including other things that hold people captive like sin and suffering. We are exhorted to praise, seek justice, rebuild and renew. Jesus quotes this passage in the synagogue and declares that in him the scripture has been fulfilled. His coming is the long-awaited jubilee, a time of redemption and new hope. In him the captives and oppressed will be set free. Jesus will proclaim the year of the Lord's favour – another term for jubilee.

Celebrating the harvest is nothing new, in fact it is as old as the hills. As soon as humans turned from hunting and gathering to agriculture, they began to give thanks to the gods, whoever they perceived them to be, when the harvest was safely brought in. The ancient Israelites gave thanks to God for the harvest, and were commanded in Deuteronomy – 'You shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from your land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket, and you shall go to the place that the Lord your God will choose, to make his name to dwell there.' (26:2).

The Jewish Harvest Festival, Sukkot, celebrates two events – the festival of the ingathering at year's end, as mentioned in Exodus, in other words an agricultural festival at the end of harvest time. But there is also a more elaborate significance to the word, and the festival, that of commemorating the Exodus and the dependence of the people of Israel on the will of God. The details of the festival, also known as the feast of the tabernacles or booths is outlined in Leviticus 23, not long before the guidelines for the jubilee. When they have brought in the harvest, they are to keep the festival of the Lord, living in booths for seven days, because the Lord made the people live in booths, temporary dwellings made from trees, when he brought them out of Egypt. Farmers also used to live in these temporary shelters during the harvest.

Christian Harvest festivals are a way of giving thanks to God for a bountiful harvest and all the riches of God's creation, and have their basis in Deuteronomy – the idea that we should

give the first fruits to God. Today, most of us have lost connection to the land and to the annual harvest, as we can have all kinds of food from all over the world, whenever we want, though we still see autumn as a time of abundance with grains harvested and an abundance of seasonal fruit like apples, plums and blackberries. Harvest is now more recognised as a day on which many churches show solidarity to those without food and distribute the harvest donations they have collected among charitable organizations. In Leviticus, in Biblical terms, the harvest and jubilee are linked. The people remember their dependence on God and that God delivered them from slavery in Egypt. In the same way that the earth is God's and not ours; we are not our own, we are the Lord's, we belong to God. This is countercultural in a world that focuses on accumulating wealth, on self-identity and individual well-being. And everyone belongs to God – people we don't like, those we disagree with, those who don't look or act like us, even those who say they do not believe in God.

Today we mark 50 years of the URC. We didn't arrive as a new-born child 50 years ago – we come from long traditions – English Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Churches of Christ and more recently, Scottish Congregationalists. Hopes were high in 1972, for the start of a united Church which would dissolve into further union churches. Sadly, this hasn't happened – worse, church attendance has plummeted in those 50 years. So, what might give us hope in this jubilee year given what might be seen as a failure of ecumenism – or at least the ecumenism envisioned in the 1960s? What might give us hope for the United Reformed Church, when some say its reason for being has gone, and many churches are closing, especially after the difficulties of the pandemic?

Between 50% and 60% of the UK population describe themselves as Christian – we might wonder what that means, but it implies there is an opportunity for evangelism with those who do not call themselves Christian, nor hold to any other major faith.

A third of the population say they believe in God which gives more scope for engagement. 40% of the population say they pray regularly. During the pandemic and the lockdowns, many people turned to prayer and online worship or prayer meetings; people who had maybe never entered a church building.

How might we tap into this spiritual awareness which hasn't, yet, translated into engagement with the Church? How do we reach the people who are searching for something, but think that church isn't for them? People looking for an alternative to our materialistic, selfish society? How might we invite and welcome new people in a way that seems welcoming to them; which may be quite different to traditional worship on a Sunday morning inside a church building? How might we show we have hope and embody that

hope in all we do? Ours is a reformed and uniting tradition, always reforming, continually seeking change, not stuck in tradition, nor with our hands tied by being the church of the state. While we have deep roots back to the Reformation, we are still a young church. Isn't 50 the new 40? Don't we look at members in our churches who are 50 or younger and think how young they are?

There is a temptation within the URC, nationally and locally, to stay the same, to not change, to not rock the boat, but the world is changing around us, has changed beyond all measure in the last few years. Let us sound the trumpet! Let us declare this year of jubilee, as a year to press the re-set button and return to God's will and God's plan. 'The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it.' We belong to God, the URC belongs to God – let us live and act as though we believe that to be so.

**Hymn** God in his love for us R&S 85

God in his love for us lent us this planet,  
gave it a purpose in time and in space:  
small as a spark from the fire of creation,  
cradle of life and the home of our race.

Long have our human wars ruined its harvest;  
long has earth bowed to the terror of force;  
long have we wasted what others have need of,  
poisoned the fountain of life at its source.

Thanks be to God for its bounty and beauty,  
life that sustains us in body and mind:  
plenty for all, if we learn how to share it,  
riches undreamed of to fathom and find.

Earth is the Lord's: it is ours to enjoy it,  
ours, as his stewards, to farm and defend.  
From its pollutions, misuse and destruction,  
good Lord, deliver us, world without end!

F. Pratt Green

**Prayers of intercession**

Eternal One, we thank you for all that is good in our world, for its beauty and abundance, for the acts of loving kindness which touch us and make a difference.

Yet in our praises we also bring to you our pain.

Today, as we celebrate harvest, the bounty of your creation, we pray for all those places suffering the effects of climate change with floods, storms, heatwaves and rising sea levels...

We pray for the Prime Minister and all world leaders that they may be guided by your will to take bold actions to protect our planet, the world you created.

We pray that governments will invest in clean energy, and in cleaner transport infrastructure.

We pray that governments will stand in solidarity with low- and middle-income countries to tackle climate change, world-wide.

Today, as we celebrate this jubilee year of the United Reformed Church, we pray for the Church: for places where Christians must meet in secret for fear of the authorities, for places where it is dangerous to witness to your love, for these places, O God, we ask your blessing.

We pray too for places where the Church is met with indifference, where we're feeble and failing, where our witness is no longer heard, and where churches are preparing to close, for these places, O God, we ask your blessing.

We pray, Holy One, for our world, for places at war or torn apart by violence, where creation groans with eager longing for a redemption long denied, where the temperatures and seas rise, and where the poorest are hit the hardest.

Christ Church, 2 Oct. 2022. URC 50<sup>th</sup> & Harvest

We pray for those who suffer from the cruel economic systems we perpetuate,  
for those worried about how they will pay their bills this winter,  
for those whose pensions and wages don't rise with inflation,  
and we pray for the government, that it will change its economic policies that have already caused  
so many problems and inequality.

We pray for your healing presence amongst those we love and worry about and name now in the  
silence of our hearts....

Holy God, source and Creator of all things, love made flesh in Jesus Christ,  
and known among us through the Holy Spirit, gather us together in your loving arms  
that we may grow in visible communion and so witness to unity in the world.

Where your people are broken, may love mend.

When hatred shouts in the world, let love bring peace with justice.

As creation groans, may redemption come to all the earth.

Come with your divine love and enter our hearts.

Move your Church, and move the world, to reconciliation and unity. Amen.

**Lord's Prayer**

**Hymn** The kingdom of God R&S 200

The kingdom of God is justice and joy;  
For Jesus restores what sin would destroy.  
God's power and glory in Jesus we know;  
And here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow.

The kingdom of God is mercy and grace;  
The prisoners are freed, the sinners find place,  
The outcast are welcomed God's banquet to share;  
And hope is awakened in place of despair.

The kingdom of God is challenge and choice:  
Believe the good news, repent and rejoice!  
God's love for us sinners brought Christ to his cross:  
Our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.

God's kingdom is come, the gift and the goal;  
In Jesus begun, in heaven made whole.  
The heirs of the kingdom shall answer his call;  
And all things cry "Glory!" to God all in all.

Bryn A. Rees

### **Blessing**

In the name of Christ, empowered by the Spirit to do greater things, let us go out to bring Good  
News to the poor, announce freedom to the prisoners, and to liberate those who suffer.

May our lives, in thought, word and deed, be an offering of love and service to God  
and to all to whom God sends us.

And the blessing of God the Creator, Jesus the Redeemer, and the peace of the Holy Spirit  
be with us now and ever more. Amen

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