

**Call to Worship** (based on Psalm 146)

Come, let us praise God together!

Blessed are we who place our trust in the Lord our God.

For our God is the Maker of the heavens, the earth, the sea,  
and everything that lives within them;

Our God keeps every promise and remains faithful forever.

Our God gives justice to those who are oppressed, and food to those who are starving.

Our God frees the prisoners, opens the eyes of the blind,  
and lifts the burdens of those who are overwhelmed.

Our God cherishes those who do what is right,  
protects the immigrants, cares for the orphans and widows,  
and frustrates the plans of the wicked.

Our God reigns - today, tomorrow and forever.

Praise God!

**HYMN** Bless the Lord, O my soul MP1259

**Offering**

I was preparing some of this service on Monday, after having watched the Queen's funeral. At the end of the service in Westminster Abbey when they sang the national anthem, I thought, they shouldn't be singing that – God save the King - because the service was about the Queen – her life of service. And commending her into God's care. But of course, in a constitutional monarchy, the moment one monarch dies, the next in line becomes the monarch. It struck me that Psalm 146, set for today is very appropriate, though no one could have known when the lectionary was set, that it would fall on this Sunday. It says, Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help. When their breath departs, they return to the earth, and their plans perish.

Whatever we may think of individual, earthly kings and queens, we worship a King who never fails and never dies. Next Saturday, 1 October, we will celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the forming of the United Reformed Church, at the Methodist Central Hall, a stone's throw from Westminster Abbey. And no doubt we will say the statement of The Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church, which we read when we inducted our elders, which includes:

We believe that Christ gives his Church a government distinct from the government of the state. In the things that affect obedience to God the Church is not subordinate to the state but must serve the Lord Jesus Christ, its only Ruler and Head.

We have one God, one ruler, one monarch to praise and obey – the one God we know and love through Jesus Christ.

**Opening Prayer**

Never put your trust in princes or politicians,

nor in any child of earth's dust, for they cannot help you.

No matter how important, they stop breathing like the rest of us,  
on that day their schemes perish and return to the earth

Happy are those whose help comes from the God of Jacob,  
whose hope rests in the God of Christ Jesus.

This is the One who makes and sustains heaven and earth,  
who keeps faith with us forever.

Faithful God, you draw near to us in our joy and in our grief,  
in our hope and in our despair.

When we are bowed down, you raise us anew.

We turn to you now in search of your healing touch.

God of compassion and love, move among us, here, this hour.

Open our eyes, dispel our fears, and show us the real life you have to offer.

We pray this in the name of the Risen One, Jesus the Christ. **Amen.**

**HYMN** Praise my soul, the King of heaven MP560

**Readings:**   **Luke 16:19-31**  
                  **1 Timothy 6:6-19**

As if Psalm 146 was not enough, our other readings for today also bang us over the head with the idea that Jesus Christ is our only Lord. The reading from Timothy ends with, 'he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords.' And the story from Luke speaks of the rich man who treated the poor man, Lazarus, badly and only realises his mistake once he is suffering in hell. While not all rich men are kings, we can be confident that all kings are rich. The rich man wishes to spare his sons the torment he is undergoing, but Abraham rightly tells him, they know what they should do – they have the teachings of Moses and the prophets to show them what is right, even if they saw someone rise from the dead, they would not be convinced. And so it is today, while some rich people do good in the world, and some give millions to charity, there are also those who get richer and richer, be they individuals or corporations like the big energy companies, and have no concern for the poor, or even the 'average' person in the street. As Paul tells us in his letter to Timothy, love of money is the root of all evil, and so it seems to be. The fact that Jesus rose from the dead does not make them change their ways.

**Last week did they do Luke 16:1-13?** The dishonest manager – ends with the well-known saying of Jesus 'You cannot serve God and wealth.' That reading opened with the words, 'there was a rich man', just as today's reading from Luke does. These two passages from chapter 16, follow on from what we heard in chapter 15 about the lost sheep and the lost coin, which was addressed to the Pharisees, in response to their complaining about Jesus spending time with sinners. Jesus then changes his focus to the disciples when he tells them the parable of the dishonest manager. This doesn't go down well with the Pharisees either, because as verse 14 of chapter 16 tells us, the Pharisees are lovers of money. And so Jesus tells the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. It is common to equate wealth with virtue, whether today or in the ancient world. Good people who work hard and live righteously can expect to be rewarded; likewise, people with means, not necessarily rich, but comparatively well off, are seen as good (clever, hardworking, righteous) because they were able to acquire wealth. In the ancient world, concepts like wealth, virtue, and masculinity worked together and reinforced one another to solidify elite status. The idea that the rich man is a good man is directly challenged by Jesus' parable.

In the ancient world, it was part of the role of the wealthy to provide care for the poor in their community. Even if it was largely self-serving, patronage was an expected means for some

of the poor to be fed while the wealthy reinforced their status with good deeds. Often there was a bench outside homes where the poor could wait for assistance. A beggar who sat on this bench at the gate could expect some sort of attention, especially from a rich man hosting a feast and his guests. And, as verse 19 says, this particular rich man feasted every day, meaning Lazarus was denied many times as the rich man repeatedly ignored the unwritten codes of that society. When he dies, the roles are reversed and the rich man gets his comeuppance. PAUSE

While you all know I'm political, with a small p, I have to say economics doesn't grab me. I don't understand economic policy, and when governments announce new budgets, I only try to work out what difference it makes to me. Since I am neither rich nor poor, they usually make very little difference at all. But there was an article by George Monbiot, I read last weekend, that did make sense and could almost be a modern version of a letter from the apostle Paul to his faithful follower Timothy, or a passage from one of the Old Testament Prophets, so often railing against the rich and exhorting the people to take care of the poor, the widows, the orphans and the immigrants. Our new Prime Minister is fanatically devoted to the doctrine of neoliberalism. This doctrine insists that politics must submit to the 'market', in other words, that democracy must submit to the power of money. Anything that might get in the way of the accumulation of wealth, be that public ownership, trade unions, political protest, or millions of people not being able to afford to heat their homes, must be torn down. Sounds pretty much like Paul to me – "those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction." In case you think, neoliberalism is something new, it has been the way the UK runs things, whoever is in government, for about 40 years, and no evidence of harm can reign it in – not the destitution of millions of people, nor the destruction of the planet. We only have to look at the floods in Pakistan and the typhoon in Japan, both pushed to the very back pages of the news, if they are mentioned at all, while the nation, even the world, mourns the passing of one, incredibly wealthy human, albeit one with many good qualities. If you prefer a more photogenic view of our destruction of the planet, try Frozen II narrated by David Attenborough, or Simon Reeve in South America, both on Sunday evenings, when the BBC clearly thinks we like to watch nature and travel with a hint of guilt tripping. "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."

Neoliberalism shifts wealth from the poor, to the rich. If you need an example of that, ponder why the government's proposal for addressing the energy bill crisis will use the taxes all of us pay rather than taxing the record-breaking profits of the oil and gas

companies. And we are sold this disgusting doctrine as a means of increasing freedom and choice. We are told that it will generate growth, and the benefits of that will trickle down from the rich to the poor. Sadly, that has proved not to be the case. Did the rich man's wealth trickle down to Lazarus? Lazarus longed to satisfy his hunger with the scraps that fell from the rich man's table, but it wasn't enough and he died.

We need an alternative to this doctrine. We need an alternative to the love of money- a positive vision of a better world. A world where resources and wealth are shared, as the early church did. We need hope.

We have that hope in Jesus Christ, our only Lord and king. As Paul tells us, 'As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.' Next week we celebrate 50 years of the URC. The 50<sup>th</sup> year was the Biblical year of jubilee and Leviticus chapter 25 tells us what happens: "you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you" – debts are repaid and the slaves are set free. Sound the trumpet, declare a jubilee, for we need a new vision of a better world, and that world is ruled by God alone.

**HYMN** All my hope on God is founded MP16

**Chat about** What do you bring with you that you want to say thank you to God for? What do you come with, that weighs heavily on you, that you want to bring to God in prayer?

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Lord, your word tells us that there is great good in godliness combined with contentment; that as we brought nothing into this world, so we can take nothing out of it. Help us to be content with what we have; to seek heavenly treasures rather than those things of this world which rust corrodes and moths consume. Grant that we might be people who share the wealth that you have provided; that we might be ones who share both the bread and wine of earth and the bread and wine of heaven.

**In your mercy, Lord hear our prayer...**

Father, we especially pray today for those like Lazarus who are ignored or neglected and left to suffer in our world; those who live in poverty locally, nationally and around the world, and those who lie in great suffering at the gates of our nation.

**Lord hear our prayer...**

Holy One, we pray for all those around the world affected by climate change, especially today we think of the people of Pakistan and Japan.

**Lord hear our prayer...**

Hear too, we pray, the petitions and the intercessions of our hearts for those who govern and are in authority; for those who lost in sin and despair; for those who need healing; and for those who seek to serve as Jesus served.

**Lord hear our prayer....**

The Bridgwater Drive Church, 25 September 2022

We especially hold before you today...

**Lord's Prayer**

**HYMN** The kingdom of God MP651

**Blessing**

May God bless us with anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people,  
so that we will work for justice, equity and peace.

May God bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war,  
so that we will reach out to comfort them and change their pain to joy.

And may God bless us with the foolishness to think that we can make a difference in the world, so  
that we will do the things which others tell you cannot be done.

And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit  
be with us all now and ever more. Amen

The Bridgwater Drive Church sung Blessing

The Bridgwater Drive Church CCLI licence 257182