

Christ Church, 16 June 2024

Call to Worship (based on Psalm 92)

It is good to praise the LORD
and make music to your name, O Most High,
to proclaim your love in the morning
and your faithfulness at night.
For you make us glad by your deeds,
we sing for joy at the works of your hands.

Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.
Let us come before God with thanksgiving
and extol him with music and song.
For the LORD is the great and only God.
the creator of heaven and earth!

Hymn O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder 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:

And 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:

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
and take me home—what joy shall fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration
and there proclaim, my God, how great thou art!

Offering

God of love, you abide with us;
you provide for all our needs and guide us in your ways.
Out of gratitude for your care, we bring our gifts before you.
Use them for your work of caring,
that all may feast at the table of abundance,
walk without fear, and drink deeply
from the cup of compassion. Amen.

Children's Time/ Intro. – Ordination of Elders

The ordination of Elders usually comes after the sermon – preaching on the Word of God, and before Communion, but since two weeks ago we inducted Elders at this point in the service and explained what that means, I thought it would be good if the children were here for the Ordination of Elders, which is an important part of church life in the URC, even if they don't understand everything. And one of the new elders, Phillip, is a leader in Sunday Club, and the other, Richard, is the dad of two members of Sunday Club.

As Elders are called and ordained, even though we sang it two weeks ago, we're going to sing again:

Hymn I, the Lord of sea and sky Red Folder 41

Here I am, Lord. I will go, Lord, if you lead me.

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin
my hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.*

I, the Lord of snow and rain.
I have borne my people's pain.
I have wept for love of them.
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
give them hearts for love alone
I will speak my words to them.
Whom shall I send?

I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them.
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send?

Children leave for Sunday Club

Opening Prayers

God of small seeds and mighty plants, you take our meagre lives
and with your love cause them to produce acts of loving kindness for you in this world.
You hear our cries and find us when we are lost and wandering in fear.
You bring us home with you so that we may be made whole, rejoicing in your goodness.
Help us to joyfully serve you all our days, knowing that you are always watching over us.
Prepare our hearts to receive your word and our spirits to respond in eagerness to serve you.
In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen**

Hymn Breathe on me breath of God R&S 295 (First tune)

Breathe on me, breath of God:
fill me with life anew,
that I may love what thou dost love
and do what thou would do.

Breathe on me, breath of God,
until my heart is pure,
until with thee I will
to do and to endure.

Breathe on me, breath of God;
till I am wholly thine,
until this earthly part of me
glows with thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, breath of God;
so shall I never die,
but live with you the perfect life
of thine eternity.

Edwin Hatch

Bible Readings: **Mark 4:30-34** **2 Corinthians 5:1, 6-17**

The experience of being truly loved is transformative and that is what we have in God through Jesus. When someone sees both our virtues and our flaws and is still committed to walking with us through life's highs and lows, it strengthens us and helps us to live more fully as ourselves. For example, when a friend takes our phone call in the middle of the night because we are anxious about a serious health issue, or grieving the loss of a loved one, we gain hope to face another day, not necessarily because our problems have been

solved, but because we know that someone deeply cares for us and will support us. We often come to know love precisely when we are at the end of our own strength or resources and others step in to give of themselves. Such experiences can change us and motivate us in turn to love and care for others.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 5, Paul writes as one who has experienced the unsurpassable love of Christ that transformed him from a persecutor of the church into a servant of the gospel of Jesus Christ. When he confidently declares in verse 17 that, “if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”, he is speaking to the Corinthian faithful out of his own experience. This new birth is not humanly possible. It is only possible through Christ. It only occurs because Christ, fuelled by divine love, took on the sin and death that alienates all people from God, who is the source of true life. The love of Jesus is ultimate. It brings people into trusting relationship with God and each other and empowers them to live out that same love, which seeks the good and growth of others. This love compels Paul and his co-workers to continue their ministry of reconciliation amidst ongoing persecution, suffering, and threat of death – “the love of Christ urges us on” as Paul says in verse 14.

Death, in fact, is necessary for new life to emerge. We see that in nature – plants die away in the winter to re-emerge in spring. Many plants and trees need a death by fire to produce new life. Sometimes change is needed to bring new life to an organisation. A metaphorical death is needed to bring new life. Across the United Reformed Church new ways of working are required, as more and more churches close and ministers retire. In this congregation today, we welcomed new growth in the form of two new, younger elders ordained and inducted. Those who are part of the body of Christ share in both his death and resurrection; not just at the moment they come to faith, but as a dynamic process that continually transforms them into the image of the One who is true love.

Paul’s talk of “new creation” presents both a promise and a challenge. It boldly affirms that the era of God’s kingdom is now encompassing all of creation because the crucified Jesus has been raised to new life. It is not something in the distant future to be anticipated after we die, but something we must work for today. It assures those who are in Christ that we have been freed from a vain way of living that compels us to prove our worth by our accomplishments and seek our own interests at the expense of others. And this is important in the run up to the election, not because being a Christian tells us which party to vote for, but being a Christian, a follower of Christ, should influence everything in our lives, including our civic duty of voting. As Christians, we are to think not only of what might work best for us as individuals, but what might be best for the whole country and especially those less

well off than us, by which I don't only mean financially, but those on the edges of society – those with caring roles for others that mean that they cannot work, yet cannot survive on the benefits offered them; those who come seeking asylum from violence and war, who come wanting to make a contribution to the country, who are not allowed to work, who waste years in inappropriate accommodation or detention because of delays to their cases being heard; those who cannot work because they spend too long on waiting lists for health conditions that could easily be treated and the list goes on of the 'least of these' that Jesus exhorted us to care for. Being a Christian is not only for me. It is not about our individual salvation, or Jesus being our best friend that we can call on when things get tough, being a Christian is dying with Christ – it is the horror and sadness of Good Friday as well as the joy and delight of Easter Sunday – it is doing our best to follow his example in the way we live our lives every minute of every day.

We live confidently knowing that the Holy Spirit has already claimed us for Christ and is preparing us to receive the fullness of God's life as Paul says at the start of the reading we heard – “we are always confident...for we walk by faith not by sight”. When our illusion of control over matters is stripped away, we can expect God to surprise us again and again by doing “a new thing,” and making “a way in the wilderness”.

But dying is painful. And change is painful. Bringing in a “new thing” will always be met by cries of ‘that won't work’; ‘we haven't done that before’; ‘we don't do it like that here’; ‘people won't like it’ though Jesus clearly didn't come to be liked, but to bring Good News to the poor and oppressed, to consort with the sinners and tax collectors, not the naysayers and law-keepers. Although God alone can transform us into those who live and love like Christ, we have to be willing to surrender to being made anew. We have to die to the old, and the old ways of doing things. In a few weeks, Skylar will be baptised by immersion – a choice she has made because it very literally represents the idea of dying to the old and rising, gasping for breath to a new life in Christ.

It is often easier for us to keep judging others, and ourselves by human standards than it is to allow the Holy Spirit to give us new vision to see everyone through the lens of Christ's love for them. Paul tells us in verse 16 that “from now on, we regard no one from a human point of view” but only through the eyes of Jesus. Embracing newness of life in the Spirit means letting go of the comfort of old thought patterns and habits that are not life-giving. Living for Christ means openness to embodying divine love to those we would otherwise deem unlovable. It means seeing God in everyone; truly acting on the belief that we are all made in the image of God, even people of other faiths, even those we disagree with, even those with opposing political views, even those holding views we will never fathom in a

lifetime! From a human perspective, even Christ appears to be an outcast or failure because of his shameful death. A crucified Messiah is “a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” Paul tells us elsewhere in his letters to the church in Corinth. Staking one’s life on this Christ might invite ridicule, or even persecution, at some point. Although Christ has already claimed us, the old era of sin and death still seeks to derail us. It is easy to give up hope especially in the face of so many conflicts around the world, in the face of what appear to be never-ending wars in the Middle East and Ukraine, with the rise in popularity of far-right groups in the heart of Europe, with the prospect of a convicted criminal perhaps once again being in the White House. It is easy to be cynical when so many politicians seem to be as bad as each other – stooping to low blows and lies, personal attacks rather than helpful policies, or policy proposals that if they are so good you wonder why the government didn’t do them already in the last 14 years!

This text from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, is ultimately one of hope and much needed promise amidst all sorts of challenges. The true love that every human being deeply longs for has already been given to us in Jesus. It is a love that knows everything about us and embraces us anyway. It is the love that transforms us to reflect Christ to our neighbours, showing them what the love of God really means in our lives, not only by doing good deeds, but as living examples of our faith in Christ. It is a powerful, reconciling love that makes it possible for people who mistrust or misunderstand each other to be brought into mutually-edifying relationships. Declaring that the old life has passed away and God’s new life has already come is an act of faith that refuses to be complacent with anything less than what God has promised us. We are the body of Christ – God’s hands and feet on earth called to make God’s kingdom of justice and peace a reality here and now.

Hymn Let us talents and tongues employ R&S 453

Let us talents and tongues employ,
reaching out with a shout of joy:
bread is broken, the wine is poured,
Christ is spoken and seen and heard.

Christ is able to make us one,
at his table he set the tone,
teaching people to live to bless,
love in word and in deed express.

*Jesus lives again; earth can breathe again.
Pass the Word around: loaves abound!*

Jesus calls us in, sends us out
bearing fruit in a world of doubt,
gives us love to tell, bread to share:
God (Immanuel) everywhere!

Fred Kaan

Lord’s Supper

As we prepare to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we make our confession:

Holy God, you never stop searching for Your people. Your care for us anticipates our need. Before we recognized we needed your grace, Your Son Jesus gave his life for our forgiveness.

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We confess that we need your forgiveness and confess our sins:
You are the shepherd and we are your flock,
but we admit the times we have tried to take your place and take control ourselves.
We admit that we have not always trusted your good news to be good for us.
At times we have pleaded with you to care for us, but we have held back from caring for others
and ignored the needs of others.
Lord, have mercy upon us. Forgive us in the name of Jesus.
Loving God, teach us by the Holy Spirit to follow You
in the days and places of the weeks ahead. Through Jesus Christ we pray, **Amen.**

We remember, as we do at every communion service, the gift of the life and death of God's Son,
our Lord Jesus Christ. Come to this table, you who are beloved in Christ. Come, not because you
must, but because you may.

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.
Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

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 has died
Christ is risen
Christ will come again.**

Lord God, 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, at the start of Refugee Week tomorrow, we pray for all refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. Grant that we may all remember your commandment to care for the stranger, to be welcoming to those who travel great distances to escape war, violence and persecution. Help us to speak out on their behalf, especially in the run-up to the general election. And help us to learn the facts rather than listening to the politically motivated lies about immigrants.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

We pray for unity and equality and an end to discrimination and prejudice of all kind. We pray for those who have experienced discrimination because of their mental health, or abuse and stigma because they live with dementia. Help us to truly remember that in Christ we are all one, created in God's image. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We pray for and with all who feel lonely and sad. For the homeless, those with addictions and those who are neurodivergent. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We pray 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 doctors, nurses, porters and cleaners, carers and their families, and all those who work for the NHS. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We pray for world leaders and democratic systems. We pray for all the countries holding elections this year, in particular our own. We pray that the process may be conducted in a decent manner without lies or slander. We pray for journalists who risk their lives to bring us the truth and for aid workers in challenging conditions. We pray for peace in all places, especially in Ukraine, Sudan and Gaza. **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. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen**

Lord's Prayer

Hymn Forth in thy name R&S 521

Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go,
my daily labour to pursue;
thee, only thee, resolved to know
in all I think or speak or do.

Thee may I set at my right hand,
whose eyes mine in-most substance see,
and labour on at thy command,
and offer all my works to thee.

The task thy wisdom hath assigned,
O let me cheerfully fulfil!
In all my works thy presence find,
and prove thy good and perfect will.

Give me to bear thine easy yoke
and every moment watch and pray,
and still to things eternal look,
and hasten to thy glorious day;

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for thee delightfully employ
what e'er thy bounteous grace hath given;
and run my course with even joy,
and closely walk with thee to heaven.

Charles Wesley

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

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