

Christ Church United Reformed Church, Rayleigh
Service
Sunday 17th August 2025

Call to worship:

Come people of the Risen One, you who delight in God, come and tune your hearts to sing. **We come to worship God.**

Come you who find joy in the morning sun, dry your nighttime tears and tell of God's victories! Come and follow the One whose love never changes and whose mercies never end. **We come to worship God**

Come Young and old, people of faith come! Come with empty hands to find the riches of God's grace; Come and rejoice, O Church of Christ, rejoice! **We come to worship God.**

Hymn: R&S 549 "One more step along the world I go"

One more step along the world I go,
one more step along the world I go,
from the old things to the new
keep me travelling along with you.
And it's from the old I travel to the new
keep me travelling along with you,

Round the corner of the world I turn,
More and more about the world I learn;
All the new things that I see
You'll be looking at along with me.
And it's from the old etc.

As I travel through the bad and good,
keep me travelling the way I should;
where I see no way to go
you'll be telling me the way I know.
And it's from the old etc.

Give me courage when the world is rough,
keep me loving though the world is tough;
leap and sing in all I do

keep me travelling along with you.
And it's from the old etc.

You are older than the world can be,
you are younger than the life in me;
ever old and ever new,
keep me travelling along with you.
And it's from the old etc.

Children's time:

I know that when you go through with Rachel you will be looking at Hebrews Chapter 11 verse 29 through to Chapter 12 verse 2. I want to look at the verses in Chapter 12 but with verse 3 added as it seems to complete what the writer was trying to say.

Can anyone tell me what “faith” is? The Chambers 20th. Century defines it as “trust or confidence” in a person or in a truth that is revealed in a religion. Of course, you should have faith in your parents that they will look after you or you might have faith that your friends will always be your friends, but I want to talk about our faith in one person in particular. Who do you think that is?

To explain this faith of ours I am going to use some slides to see what we must do to have faith. [Slide show]

So many difficulties but my final message to you children this morning is contained in verse three and included in the last two slides. Keep your mind on Jesus. He put up with many insults from sinners but if you remember his life then you will never be discouraged and give up. God bless you all.

Hymn R&S 30 “Father we love you”

1. Father we love you, we worship and adore you;
glorify your name in all the earth,
glorify your name, glorify your name,
glorify your name in all the earth.
2. Jesus we love you, we worship and adore you;
glorify your name, etc.
3. Spirit, we love you, we worship and adore you;

Glorify your name, etc.

Collection

Prayer (incl. the Lord's Prayer (traditional) after which the children go to Sunday Club

We come to worship You, O Most High, for you have planted, nurtured and cared for us, as a farmer cares for their crops. You have ensured that we are rooted in Your Word, watered by your own hand, and bathed in your light. For this we thank you.

We come to worship You, O Risen Lord, to ensure that we grow right, to see where we need pruning and to confront the fact that we often produce rotten fruit.

So often when we hoped to provide sustenance we have yielded on bitter vinegar. Where we desired to be good, we have become bitter and twisted. Where we once showed such promise, we have failed to follow. Forgive us, Good Lord, where our wealth has made others poor, where our greed has led to others hunger, where our lifestyles despoil the earth that supports us. Forgive us, walk with us and guide us so that we learn to change and follow Your will.

We come to worship you, Most Holy Spirit, in the faith that we can be forgiven, in the hope that we can change, in the promise of the Eternal Trinity of Love, give you time to change. you guiding presence which also sustains us and strengthens us every day.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, May God, the vinedresser continue to nurture you, May God the Good Shepherd, continue to lead you. May God the forgiving One, hold you in divine arms and May God the Eternal Trinity of Love, give you time to change. **AMEN**

And we continue in prayer, be saying the prayer that our Lord and Saviour taught His disciples: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. **AMEN**

Reading: Isaiah Ch 5 vv1-23

Talk 1

Verses 1-7 are some of the best-known verses from Isaiah but make little sense without the rest of the passage that Wendy read to us. Isaiah, being a resident of Jerusalem was deeply concerned justice, linking it to the fate of the people. Concerned with the rich amassing more power and land (is it just me or does this ring bells in the present day?), Isiah had asked his Judean audience to play the role of judge as he outlined the case against the people, Only in verse seven is God revealed as the vintner.

The passage dates from about seven centuries before Jesus when a reborn Assyrian empire asserted its power in the ancient Middle East influencing Babylon and Egypt as well as Israel, Judah's northern neighbour. At the same time Greek city states were starting to rise and the Roman civilisation was in its early years.

Amos and Isaiah condemned religious practices and the oppression of the poor in the Jewish kingdom Judah. Isaiah uses poetry and rhetoric to trap his audience before they realise that it is they who are at the receiving end of his barbs. Verses 8-23 explain what irked Isaiah led to his diatribe and in the Good News Rainbow Bible is headed "The evil that people do", which I think covers the theme very well indeed! Isaiah understood all political and economic success and failure was related to the moral condition of society. The present crisis when he was writing related, in his eyes, to the injustice and unrighteousness he outlined in verses 8 to 23. He highlighted the insatiable greed of the rich who join houses and field together, presumably pushing out others, to create ever larger estates which are exploited by absentee owners. Like the Highland Clearances of the Victorian era the peasants were ejected from their land so that the landowners could make more profit and leaving no place for the dispossessed. For those of you who are unaware of these clearances there are the main reason why Scots populated places like the USA, Australia and Canada leaving villages abandoned or burnt to the ground.

Like Jesus centuries later, Isaiah uses a parable to draw his hearers in and then make them apply the truth to their own situation. If they truly listen, they will find themselves judged and not in a favourable light it must be said.

The vinter, God, as we discover in verse 7, brings a charge in court against a strange vineyard (The rich) that refuses to bring forth good fruit. As the grapes are bitter, useless, and rotten, the vineyard will be destroyed, Given the rise of Assyria, such a threat of destruction was very real once Isaiah's listeners made the link between the vineyard and their society controlled by the selfish rich. The invasion that came to the northern kingdom of Israel and threatened Judah, was seen by Isaiah as God's judgement – a warning that should wake up the southern kingdom of Judah. After this chapter, Isaiah does offer hope; the coming calamity is God's dreadful judgement but is not the end.

Hymn; R&S 49: "Sing praise to the Lord"

1) Sing praise to the Lord!
praise him in the height;
rejoice in his word,
blest angels of light;
high heavens, adore him
by whom you were made,
and worship before him
in brightness arrayed.

2) Sing praise to the Lord,
all people on earth;
in tuneful accord
sing praise for new birth;
praise him who has brought you
his grace from above,
praise him who has taught you
To sing of his love.

3) Sing praise to the Lord,
all things that give sound;
each jubilant chord
re-echo around;
loud organs, his glory
forth tell in deep tone,
and, sweet harp, the story
of what he has done.

4) Sing praise to the Lord!
thanksgiving and song
to him be outpoured
all ages along;
for love in creation,
for heaven restored,
for grace of salvation:
sing praise to the Lord.

Reading: Luke Ch. 12 vv49-56

Talk 2

We tend not to think that Jesus came into the world to bring fire and division; those who hold that He did we treat, understandably with caution. Yet in today's reading Jesus seems to make this the key facets of His mission. What a shock that would have been to those who were learning to regard Jesus as the Messiah, the Anointed One of God. They regarded the Messiah as conqueror and king, and the Messianic age as

a golden time. Neither does Jesus' mood improve in the second part of the reading, where he condemns the people for being able to interpret weather patterns, but not understanding the social and religious situation of the present time a common theme between our two readings this morning. The term "hypocrite" might mean "pretender" "play-actor" or "fraud," but these are terms that theological students are encouraged not to use in respect of their future church members! Earlier in the chapter, around verse 5, Jesus has condemned the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and has told the people to fear the God who has power to send us to hell. Also, immediately before our reading Luke put the parable of the Son of Man coming at an unexpected hour saying much is expected from those to whom much has been expected. After our reading, Luke put harsh words where Jesus spoke of people whom Pilate had murdered, and those who had died in an accident, saying that his hearers would, like them, perish unless they repented. Clearly, Luke arranged several difficult stories to sit together.

Let us think first of the division in families that Jesus spoke about. He doesn't say that he came to cause division, but that division is a result of His coming. Different members of the same families came to and still come to on who Jesus is and why His claims are so vital. My own family is like this for whilst one of my nephews is a Church of Scotland minister in Stirling and his mother is a church member not of the rest of the family are in any way religious. Again, my twin and I were brought up in a Christian household and although I have been a committed Christian all my adult life, my twin has discarded the church. These divisions do sit rather uncomfortably with so much of what we say about Jesus, yet Luke's gospel also includes the parable of the prodigal son, whose reconciliation with his father a further breach with his brother. The URC rejoices in the fact that we are a union of four different churches but glosses over the fact that each of those unions led, paradoxically, to further division as congregations who don't wish to join had to find other futures and directions.

Perhaps we should just try to understand the text, however unsatisfactory that might be as it discomforts us and reminds us of the Jesus we don't know and don't like to think about. Gentle, peaceful Jesus is also grumpy Jesus promising judgement. The Christ who is "born in the beauty of the lilies" is the same one who has "loosed the fateful lightening of His terrible swift sword" the as the Battle Hymn of the Republic puts it. This passage, like our passage from Isaiah, speaks of

Christ's role as judge, where through God's power, evil and sin are defeated. Yet what we know of Christ, speaks of mercy and kindness. In God's good time, and in God's own way, when division is seen, there is a chance for the gospel to break in and change lives.

In our society, there are many examples of injustice, for example the rich seem more than able to avoid paying all the tax they owe, whilst those claiming benefits are heavily penalised for the most innocent and trivial mistakes. Again, in a society where the dream of owning a house is fast disappearing for many people, social housing, i.e. council housing, has been replaced by so-called affordable housing, where in reality this kind of housing is far from being affordable for many. What might Jesus, or Isaiah for that matter, make of our society where so few have so much, where we hanker for the latest gadgets, yet often struggle for the necessities. I leave you with that thought to ponder.

Hymn: R&S 433“O thou who camest from above”

O thou who camest from above,
the pure celestial fire to impart,
kindle a flame of sacred love
on the mean alter of my heart,

There let it for thy glory burn
with inextinguishable blaze;
and trembling to its source return,
in humble prayer and fervent praise.

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
to work and speak and think for thee;
still let me guard thy holy fire,
and still stir up thy gift in me.

Ready for all thy perfect will,
My acts of faith and love repeat,
Till death thine endless mercies seal,
And make my sacrifice complete.

Prayers of Intercession (Gwyneth)

Hymn: R&S 39 "All creatures of our God & King"

All creatures of our God and king,
lift up your voice and with us sing,
alleluia, alleluia!

Thou burning sun with golden beam,
thou silver moon with softer 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 etc.

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 etc.

Dear Mother earth, who day by day,
unfoldest blessings on our way,
O praise him, alleluia!
The flowers and fruits that in the grow,
Let them his glory also show:
O praise him etc.

All ye that are of tender heart,
forgiving others, take your part,
O sing ye alleluia!
Ye who long pain and sorrow bear,
praise God and on him cast your care:
O praise him etc.

And thou, most kind and gentle death,
waiting to hush our latest breath,

O praise him, alleluia!
Thou leadest home the child of God,
and Christ our Lord the way has trod:
O praise him etc.

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 etc.

Dismissal and blessing

Our service now has ended. May you depart in peace and joy!
May the One who inspired prophets to speak truth to power,
the One who taught us to understand the signs of the time,
and the One who urges us to be justice seeking people,
inspire you, give you the grace to understand and the desire to pursue
justice,
that you may bless others as you have been blessed yourselves.

And the blessing of almighty God,
Father, son and Holy Spirit, be with you, now and forever more.