

Sheffield United Reformed Churches
Team Ministry worship for individual or family
Sunday 5th July 2020 at 10:30 am.

5th Sunday after Pentecost

Call to worship

Jesus says: 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.'

Hymn (R&S 67)

Immortal, invisible, God only wise, In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unchanging, and silent as light, Nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;
Thy justice like mountains high soaring above;
Thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all, life thou givest, to both great and small; In all life thou livest, the true life of all;
We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
And wither and perish, but naught changeth thee.

Great Father of glory; O help us to see: 'tis only the splendor of light hideth thee
And so let thy glory Almighty impart
Through Christ in the story Thy Christ to the heart

Prayers of Approach, Confession and Thanksgiving

God of salvation, we are surprised to discover your desire to have us as your people; we are surprised by the freedoms you have bestowed upon us; and from our surprise we turn in thankfulness to praise you for your trust in the choices we will make. We give you thanks that you see the child in all of us and we remember that you were once a child who lived on earth. We thank you for remembering our name and for loving us, although we get things wrong.

Forgive us, we pray.

We are thankful for our freedom; the people who inspire us with the story of faith they tell; the gift of living as a fellowship offering love to the community

The Lord's Prayer



Readings

Psalm 145: 8-14 – a song of praise

Matthew 11:16- 19 (25-30)

The world childishly rejects what does not come on its own terms. But the Kingdom is still revealed to children! Jesus invites those who are tired of travailing in mission to come and rest in Him in child-like trust.

Reflection

Children can be little angels who can melt a grandparent with a look or – before lockdown – a hug. But let's not forget that most of them are capable of being little monsters at certain times. Looking at a passage in Matthew 11:16-19, Jesus seems well aware of that as he compares his critics responses to both John the Baptist and his own lifestyles as like that of children who are annoyed that other children won't toe the line and behave according to the rules they have invented. Even so, Jesus goes on to reflect that children have special access to insights of heavenly truth not granted to the learned and wise. What exactly was Jesus getting at?

Perhaps we have to go to the additional text here in the phrase 'wisdom is proved right by her deeds' to find the answer. Ivan Illich, an Austrian Catholic priest and original social thinker wrote a book called, *De-schooling Society*. One of his hobby horses was that the best thing any child could be equipped with was what he called a 'crap detector' - that is, a set of skills that would enable one to see through nonsense. For our more refined ears, let's call it a 'rubbish sensor.'

What Illich meant was that whatever parents, teachers or other adults are trying to teach children, a child's own acid test would be: By their deeds shall you know them! In other words, if a child is told that God is a loving father, for instance, but their experience is that fathers are unloving or cruel in their experience.

To embrace the love of Jesus requires that childhood ability to respond unconditionally to God's unconditional love. That ability will not be lost with lost school hours. It does get lost through our investment in personal securities which avoid risk and hurt as we grow older, if not wiser. It means we find it so much more difficult to accept Jesus' challenge to be willing to give up everything to possess the *Pearl of Great Price*.

A child once gave me a fresh insight into that parable which is, in my view, at the heart of the gospel. He was part of a group being told the parable of the pearl merchant who found a pearl so precious, he sold absolutely everything else he owned in order to possess it for himself. The story was told through the process of what is called Godly Play, where, at the end of the story the question is asked: "I wonder what the pearl really is?"

My response would have been, 'well, it's Jesus and his love.' That's what I'd been taught and I'd never questioned that interpretation. But this little lad had immersed himself in the story and, as a child, used his own imagination to conclude – the pearl is me! I think he saw Jesus as the Pearl Merchant who had found him and loved him so much that Jesus was prepared to give up everything for love of him. He had arrived at the same essential truth of God's love for him, but through his own imagination and without the formal interpretation I was given. Both versions valid, but he owned his for himself.

Give children the paints and brushes of love and acceptance and forgiveness and a sense of worth and they will find the clues in the parables and other Gospel stories without us painting the picture for them as we perceive it. Let them own their own picture by giving them the skills to paint for themselves with freshness and imagination. For of such is the kingdom...

Maybe we can find a freshness and a new perspective on the Gospel if we can rediscover the child in each of us – with imagination and an appetite for discovery and with no fear of wandering into new adventures, regardless of the risk. Is that what Jesus meant? I wonder...

Prayers of Intercession

Through dreams and visions, O God, you broaden the horizon and hope of your people, that they may discover the meaning of your covenant, even in the midst of these challenging times.

Increase the number of those who believe in your word so that all people may joyfully respond to your call and share in your promises.

God invites us to hold the needs of our sisters and brothers as dear to us as our own needs. Loving our neighbours as ourselves, we offer our thanksgivings and our petitions on behalf of the church and the world. We pray especially for the people of India and the USA.

We pray for all the children in the world, especially those who are ill, those who are unable to go to school, those who do not have food to eat and live in poor conditions. We remember the children here who are fearful of going back to school. We ask that you keep them and their teachers safe and protect them as they come together.

God, you call us to love and serve you with body, mind, and spirit through loving your creation and through each other. Open our hearts in compassion and receive these prayers through the ministry of your Son, and proclaim your saving love for us all. - **Amen.**

Hymn (R&S 558) - The Summons

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown? Will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean in you and you in me?

Will you love the "you" you hide if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?

Lord your summons echoes true when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.
In Your company I'll go where Your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.

Blessings

Jesus has called us to come to him as his children.
He has blessed us with his richness.
Now he sends us out into the world, to be the light for all to see
Blessings of God, the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit
Be you all now and always.