

Sheffield United Reformed Churches
Team Ministry worship for individual or family
Sunday 16th August 2020 at 10:30 am.

Call to Worship

Come together in the presence of God, come knowing that God welcomes all...

Hymn (R&S 601)

Christ is the world's true light, its captain of salvation,
The day-star clear and bright, desire of every nation;
New life, new hope awakes for all who own his sway:
Freedom her bondage breaks, and night is turned to day.

In Christ all races meet, their ancient feuds forgetting,
The whole round world complete, from sunrise to its setting:
When Christ is throned as Lord, all shall forsake their fear,
To ploughshare beat the sword, to pruning-hook the spear.

Collect for the day

Let your merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of your humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions make them to ask such things as shall please you; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.

Prayer

God, creator and maker of all things, thank you for all the love and mercy you continue to show us. For the air we breathe, the food we eat and for fresh flowing water.

God, our Father and Mother we approach you today, to bring praise and honour to your kingdom, to learn from you and to walk in your way. Your wisdom, shown to us through Jesus, who has called us to follow, learn and to go tell the Good news for all to hear.

We approach you now as children, sitting at your feet, bathed in your love, listening to what you have to say to us and discerning your will in our lives.

Speak to us, Lord, and help us to listen. We come before you, gracious God, just as we are, with our weaknesses and our vulnerabilities. We come to offer and receive. We come to you, the king of love – in the name of your Son. Speak to us Lord and help us to listen.

We come to say we are sorry and to seek forgiveness...we pray that we will have the mind of Christ, informed by love and forever merciful.

All these prayers we raise through the prayer, Jesus taught his disciples... **Our Father**



Isaiah 56:1, 6-8 – God builds a community of diverse people

Romans 11: 1-2a, 29-32 - God doesn't take back the gifts he has given, or forget about the people he has chosen.

Matthew 15: 10-20 – it is sometimes easy to misunderstand what is being said in the heat of the moment!

Reflection (from Douglas)

A couple of weeks ago, Julia and I were at the World Science Fiction Convention in New Zealand. What with one thing and another, we did it online instead of going to New Zealand in person, but even online, going to the “Worldcon” is still exciting.

And when we run one of these conventions in person, we try to arrange things so that everyone who might want to come to the convention is able to do so without being prevented by their race, or gender, or religion, or their level of ability. See, SF Fandom is a community, and we resolve that no-one there is beneath our regard. We’ve tried to the same for this online convention as well.

Wait a bit, this document is for act of worship, not a convention. And I’m not pitching an SF convention to you, I’m writing a reflection. Why, then, am I telling you this?

While we we’ve been spending our time preparing to deliver our online convention to this community of Science Fiction fans, we heard the news coming out of the USA.

Do you remember what happened in Minnesota on May 25th? Do you remember what happened throughout the USA in the several weeks that followed?

On May 25th, the Minnesota police department killed George Floyd, a person they were arresting. They killed him in the same way that they’ve killed many, many people of colour during arrests. Or without even attempting an arrest.

Here’s the thing, here’s why I want to talk about this during our act of worship today: in the United Reformed tradition we understand worship as a renewal of our covenant relationship with God, and we remember how that is connected with our relationships with our neighbours.

We recommit ourselves to living as God would have us live. As the people of God, we come together to recall and proclaim the history of salvation, the story of God’s delivering power in this world – a story filled with God’s special love and passionate concern for the poor and excluded, the enslaved and oppressed.

In worship we celebrate God’s past, present, and future deliverance and proclaim the already-but-not-yet kingdom of God, in which peace will exist in its fullness and all people, regardless of age, race, or gender, will flourish in God’s presence. Let’s be quite clear about this: There is no way in which the killing of George Floyd has any part at all to play in God’s plan for Humankind.

In fact, I’d go further: There’s no way in which someone in a position of privilege remaining silent while witnessing this kind of institutional, structural racism has any part at all to play in God’s plan for Humankind. That’s not living as God would have us live; that’s not working towards the Kingdom. Let’s not play that game. Let’s not be silent when we see things so at odds with God’s plan.

So the Isaiah reading, like Psalm 67 (to which it’s quite similar, and which is also appointed to be read today), tell the Israelites that God’s saving power is for all peoples. Foreigners can love God too, says the Lord-as-reported-by-Isaiah; foreigners will be brought into God’s house and will be welcome there. My house, says the Lord-as-reported-by-Isaiah, is for all nations.

See, one of the things that some of the powerful white men in the USA really hate, is that God's love, God's mercy and God's saving power is available to all people, including black people, women, non-Americans, and those who treat those groups as if they're real people, just as much as it is for powerful white men.

What the powerful white men in the USA would like to be the case is for black people, women, and non-Americans to be discarded, to be regarded as disposable. And when the other, more reasonable, anti-fascist people said things like "we don't believe that murdering innocent black men is part of God's plan", police forces turned up to suppress those protests, violently.

Some of the powerful white men in the USA really, honestly believe that granting equality to black people and women and non-Americans will result in less equality for themselves. It's like they're too stupid to understand what the meaning of equality is.

Cue Paul, who is countering a parallel argument between the Jewish establishment figures within the church in Rome and the Gentile majority there. Just because God has made his love and mercy and saving power available to the Gentiles in Rome, it doesn't mean that he's turned his back on the Jews. Far from it! "God doesn't take back the gifts he has given, or forget about the people he has chosen", says Paul about the Jews.

Likewise, if society grants equality to a group that has previously been marginalised, it doesn't automatically mean that a middle-aged solvent white dude like me will suffer. Far from it! As a middle-aged solvent white dude, I'd like to state for the record that granting equality to groups that have historically been oppressed by middle-aged solvent white dudes isn't going to harm me at all. So there. Let's work towards that.

Prayers of Intercession

We remember the people of Lebanon following the explosion and Sumatra following the volcanic eruption.

We pray for the Churches around the world, churches in this country, where there is still doubts about whether, they will ever re-open. We offer prayers for the future of our churches, may we take heart and listen to what you are saying to us.

We pray for Christians who are persecuted. We think of places where injustice and oppression are part of everyday life. We remember the people who have come across in the boats over the past months...

We pray for people who are unwell, isolated and lonely. Those who are finding lockdown difficult, people who are in financial difficulties. Students who have received their exam results and are unhappy with them.

We remember the people who have died and those who have been injured the train crash in Scotland. We lift up in prayers those who are in our hearts and we name them...

All our prayers we lift to you, enable us to take up our cross and to follow where you lead in the power of the Spirit forever. Amen

Hymn (R&S 620)

For the healing of the nations, Lord, we pray with one accord,
for a just and equal sharing of the things that earth affords.
To a life of love in action help us rise and pledge our word.

Lead us forward into freedom, from despair your world release,
That, redeemed from war and hatred, all may come and go in peace.
Show us how through care and goodness fear will die and hope increase.

Blessing

Lord God, the world awaits us with all its challenges and uncertainties – but also with its opportunities.

Be with us for the coming week, to look intentionally for opportunities to share your word and to act accordingly.

Blessings of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you now and always.
Amen