

**Sheffield United Reformed Churches
Team Ministry worship for individuals or families**

Sunday 18th October at 10:30 am

Call to Worship (Revelation 11:15)

There are loud voices in heaven, which proclaim: "Hallelujah!
The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ,
and he will reign for ever and ever."

Hymn - R&S 339

Great God, your love has called us here as we, by love, for love were made.
Your living likeness still we bear, though marred, dishonored, disobeyed.
We come, with all our heart and mind your call to hear, your love to find.

We come with self-inflicted pains of broken trust and chosen wrong,
Half-free, half-bound by inner chains, by social forces swept along,
By powers and systems close confined, yet seeking hope for humankind.

Great God, in Christ you call our name and then receive us as your own,
Not through some merit, right or claim, but by your gracious love alone.
We strain to glimpse your mercy seat and find you kneeling at our feet.

Great God, in Christ you set us free your life to live, your joy to share.
Give us your Spirit's liberty to turn from guilt and dull despair
And offer all that faith can do while love is making all things new.

Prayer of Worship

Almighty and Eternal God,
We come before your presence, separately, from our individual homes, but together in our love
for you.

You are our Maker and Minder: in you darkness becomes light and chaos becomes order.
You are our Friend reaching out a hand of forgiveness and hope, through Jesus, to the world,
embracing us with courage and strength.

You are our Guide, breathing your spirit into us, and between us
so that we can know your grace in our lives
and show that grace to the world.

Loving God, Maker and Minder, Friend and Guide
we come before you now in humility, to worship you,
in Jesus' name.

Forgive us, Lord, for overlooking you in the bustle and distraction of our Covid-focussed days;
for being impatient with each other,
for failing to listen - to others' points of view,
but, most importantly, failing to listen to you.
Lord, we thank you for giving us life and strength,
faithfulness and compassion.

We thank you for your promise of grace and the light of your Word,
cleansing us and bringing the assurance of right relationships - and your peace.

We thank you, Lord.
Amen.



Readings

Exodus 33: 12-23 - Moses is hidden in the cleft of a rock so he may see the glory of God.

Psalm 99 - The Lord reigns...

Matthew 22: 15-22 - Render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar...

I Thessalonians 1: 1-10 - Paul rejoices that the Gospel has come with life-changing power to one of his church-plants

Reflection - by Micheal Gillott of Central URC

In our Gospel reading the Pharisees are determined to find a way to bring down Jesus. They decide on a question about paying taxes to Caesar, which Jews found very difficult to accept. They hoped Jesus would launch into a debate on the validity of paying the tax. Jesus, knowing their intentions, asks only to see a coin used for the taxes. He knows full well the images on these coins as he would have been using them since being a boy, images that contradicted the command not to make nor worship images, a command vital to the Jews.

Jesus ask the question to the disciples of the Pharisees “Whose image and title are on the coin?” Naturally they answer that it is Caesar’s hoping to push him either into a speech against Caesar or a statement against Jewish sensibilities about graven images. Either way he would be in trouble. Much to their amazement Jesus doesn’t bite but rather gives the very apt answer of “give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.” There is no answer to that so the disciples of the Pharisees left amazed (we might pause to ask how they got hold of the coin they so despised so readily when Jesus asked them and why the Pharisees sent their stooges as fall-guys rather than sticking their necks out in front of the crowd?!).

Now on to the reading from Thessalonians. I noticed something I had not previously when reading this. The opening line states that the letter was not only from Paul but also from Silas and Timothy. This took me by surprise as I had always believed it was from Paul alone. However, on reflection is makes sense that it’s from all three as they would have been working together at the time still spreading the gospel to the Gentiles. Most likely this letter was written on the return of Timothy from Thessalonica reporting back to Paul. I get the feeling that Paul was deeply moved by the progress made by the church in Thessalonica thus writing this lovely opening to his letter. In these verses Paul shows us the way we are to be at all times.

He also brings us hope and encouragement in these difficult times, like the church of Thessalonica who were going from strength to strength spreading the word and encouraging others even under terrible suffering. Paul is encouraging them to keep going even though things will probably become even tougher.

I would like to encourage us in these difficult times to take heart and continue to spread the word even as times are difficult now, when we are “By powers and systems close confined”, forced to “give to Caesar” by keeping all these difficult and inconvenient lockdown rules. Things will get more difficult as time goes on.

We find ourselves in times of terrible uncertainty much like the church in Thessalonica and other churches of the time. We have the benefit of being able to read about and learn from their experiences. The way I see things is we are in a similar boat to those churches. We can learn from them by keeping things moving and making many important decisions now that will either keep our church moving forward or falling back. These decisions will not be easy ones and some will seem to spell the end of the church but I would like to encourage you further.

These times have brought to light a fundamental flaw in the church today and although it may seem that the church may never recover, I truly believe that God's plan is perfect and fully on track. He knows the next steps and I pray we will follow His divine guidance.

We are working our way towards the time when "the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ", when earthly Caesars will give way to the Heavenly King, just as the Roman Empire was subverted by a revolution of power from below, the power that Paul rejoiced was at work among the Thessalonians.

So, this is not the demise of the church but rather a renewal into a new and better way of thinking and believing. Just as the Thessalonians needed to change the way they did things to bring the ways of our Lord Jesus Christ to others, so we must embrace this new way and make the difficult decisions that are before us. Not to keep our beloved ways because we are attached to them or have sentimental value, but rather think of expanding and going back to basics finding the new way and giving it our all - "rendering to God that which is God's". For, working together as one unit, we will be victorious just as the Thessalonians were.

I pray that the Lord will guard, guide and keep us in these times of trial. May he lead us forward in the way He is pointing us. May we willingly accept His way and work together as one big team in the body of Christ. We are all in the same boat. May we paddle together to reach the other side stronger and willing to do everything the Lord requires. Amen

Song of dedication

I will offer up my life in spirit and truth pouring out the oil of love as my worship to You
In surrender I must give my every part, Lord, receive the sacrifice of a broken heart

*Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring to so faithful a friend, to so loving a King?
Saviour, what can be said, what can be sung
As a praise of Your name for the things You have done?
O my words could not tell, not even in part of the debt of love that is owed by this thankful heart*

You deserve my every breath for You've paid the great cost
Giving up Your life to death, even death on a cross
You took all my shame away, there defeated my sin
Opened up the gates of heaven and have beckoned me in.

Jesus, what can I give...? etc

Prayers of Intercession

Lord, help us to see the ways you are working it all out for our own good. Help us to know we can trust you even in the middle of the storm.

You are the Lord and Saviour of our lives and we recommit our trust in you. Thank you for the protection and love we all receive. We are sorry for the time we try to take control and doubt you. May our faith be renewed to trust in you in the days and weeks ahead

We pray for our world, a world torn apart with wars and disease. We pray for our own country for our leaders in government, medicine and science; may the decisions they reach be the right ones in a difficult situation.

We remember our doctors and nurses and all the emergency services who once again will be battling with covid, also for all working in the food industry and transport services bringing food to our shops and tables. We think of our police officers in these challenging times. We remember the families of those killed in the line of duty. We pray for all those who work to ensure that we have safe water, gas and electricity every day.

Bless our Ministers and Leaders in these difficult times may our prayers support them through it all.

We thank you for prayers answered when people recover and remember the families who have lost loved ones. We pray for people feeling afraid and isolated at this time.

Tis Jesus the First and the Last whose Spirit will guide us home. We will praise him for all that is past and trust him for all that is to come.

And now we join our prayers with each other, with those unable to be with us today and with all Your people across the world as we say the prayer that You taught... **Our Father...**

Hymn R&S 582 (Goes to the tune: Truro - "*Jesus shall reign, where'er the sun...*")

Thanks be to God, whose Church on earth has stood the tests of time and place,
And everywhere proclaims new birth through Christ whose love reveals God's face.

Thanks be to God, whose spirit sent Apostles out upon his way;
From east to west the message went; on Greek and Roman dawned the day.

Thanks be to God who now would reach His listeners in more global ways;
Now each will send the news, and each receive and answer it in praise.

Thanks be to God, in whom we share today the mission of his Son:
May all his Church that time prepare when, like the task, the world is one.

Blessing

We give to God what belongs to Him
Heads to think,
Hands to serve
And Hearts to love
That His Kingdom may come and the world be changed

And as we offer our lives to the Father, through the Son and for the Holy Spirit
May we be blessed