

Sheffield United Reformed Churches - Team Ministry
Worship for individuals or families - Sunday 4th October 2020 at 10:30 am.

Call to Worship

Lord, as we come to worship You,
Open our eyes to Your true glory, our ears to hear and understand your word,
Our hearts and minds to acknowledge You as You really are - and to do your will.

Hymn - R&S 11738

O Lord my God, When I in awesome wonder, consider all the worlds Thy Hands have made;
I see the stars, I hear the rolling 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 see the brook, and feel the gentle breeze.

Then sings my soul...

And when I think, that God, His Son not sparing, sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on a Cross, my burdens gladly bearing, he bled and died to take away my sin.

Then sings my soul...

We say Psalm 19...

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.
The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever.
The decrees of the LORD are firm, and all of them, together, are righteous.
They are more precious than gold, sweeter than honey.
By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

Prayers of Worship and Confession

Lord, we give you thanks and praise. Lord, we worship you. Lord, we acknowledge that you are the
source of all our strength, wisdom and meaning. To you belongs all honour, power and glory.
By you and through you, all things have been made and in you all things hold together.
Everything in heaven and on earth was created for your pleasure and is yours.

You are the beginning of all things and the end of all things. You are the first-born from among the
dead and all hope rests in you through your glorious resurrection. We praise you as Head of your
people, the Church, for all the fullness of God's abundant life resides in you. You have called us to
join you in your work of reconciling all things in heaven and on earth to you through your blood, shed
on the cross.

We confess, Lord, that we have often strayed from the path you have set before us. We have not
appreciated your great gifts and we have not respected our fellow citizens. Forgive us where we
have failed to put you first, for opportunities missed or ignored, for our wrong thoughts or feelings.
Help us, Lord, to put right the wrongs we have done and to live our lives with you at the heart of
everything we think, do and say. Amen.



Readings

Exodus 20: 1-20 - God gives Israel His Laws for life...

Psalms 19 - The Psalmist hears God speak through nature and His Law

Matthew 21: 33-46 - The Tenants in the vineyard want to supplant the owner...

Philippians 2: 1-13 - Paul presses on to what lies ahead: knowing Christ...

Reflection - by Simon

You might be surprised to know that, despite my easy-going nature, I'm actually a bit of a stickler for the rules. If people follow the rules sports matches turn into pleasant occasions. If people follow the rules several cars can negotiate the same piece of road that all their drivers want to occupy - and everyone can get where they want to go. Breaking the rules is annoying. Failing to signal at a roundabout or straddling two parking bays: these are infringements, in Simon's world, punishable by death! Only joking (?).

But, seriously - it's more than "annoying". We see the chaos and heartbreak that ensues when rules are broken. Nations go to war, communities are divided, families and relationships breakdown, people get hurt, and diseases spread. We see the evidence of lawlessness and rule-breaking all around us. It is making the world a frightening place. This is what happens when people don't want to be tenants in God's vineyard but would rather be the owners.

But God speaks into this chaos. He reveals his rules and he reveals the beautiful world that could exist if we chose to follow his commands. The beauty of that world is demonstrated in our readings (from Psalm 19), reminding us of the first way in which God chooses to reveal his thoughts: through creation. "The heavens declare the glory of God" and although they have no voice they speak eloquently of his character, faithfulness, goodness and dependability. Whether we've never opened the Bible or heard of Jesus Christ, God is speaking of hope in every sunrise.

Our other Old Testament reading shows the second way in which God speaks and reveals his rules for living. In Exodus we hear the commands that God gave to his people, Israel, following their liberation. The Psalmist also picks up this theme, talking of the perfection of the Law of the Lord and the benefits that it can bring to every individual.

At the heart of the legal code are commands about our aspirations towards, and our vision for, a better world. The Israelites are encouraged to worship God in all his Holy Majesty and moral beauty. They are forbidden to make any images in the likeness of anything in the creation, because to do so would be to automatically limit their perception of who God is and, by so doing so, to limit their vision of the kind of people they should be as they live in relationship to him. They are forbidden to misuse the privilege and power that that relationship brings - as his children, they know his name but they are not to misuse it.

Here are laws that provide a basis for just and harmonious relationships: in stable families, in business dealings, in economic arrangements, in political dialogue. Violence, dishonesty, impurity, corruption and envy are ruled out. The Sabbath rules provide a safeguard against exploiting others and even overworking ourselves. Even the environment benefits as it enjoys a Sabbath-rest, something we have caught a glimpse of during this lockdown period. This is the basis for loving our neighbour and loving our world, as we love ourselves.

These laws have formed the basis of all that is good and best in any culture and civilisation that has adopted them. But that Judeo-Christian heritage is being dismantled aggressively in our time (with all the ensuing chaos that has brought). They are perfect, trustworthy, right and radiant - and utterly impossible to keep.

And so, the Apostle Paul discovers that, despite his best efforts to follow God's commands (that would put us all to shame), peace, life and love elude him. He needs something more. He needs to find inner motivation for himself and love for those around him.

He tells his listeners in Philippi that he finds these things in knowing Christ. His righteousness does not come by his own efforts in keeping God's commands, but through faith in Christ. It is a righteousness that comes from God as a gift of grace: while Paul strives to take hold of this new life he realises that Christ has taken hold of him. He considers everything as worthless compared to the surpassing worth of being in a relationship with God the Father, through Jesus the Son.

He is invited to be and to live in that relationship by the power of the resurrection, just as the owner of the vineyard invites his tenants to become partners in the family business - to enter into a family affair, by sending his son to negotiate the new relationship. And this is the third way in which God has revealed himself: through his Son who bore his image, perfectly.

This is not a one-off occurrence that is easily worked out in reality. Paul does not consider himself to have reached his destination but he forgets what is behind and presses on to win the prize to which he has been called.

Which brings us back to the central command given to the people of Israel: to know God as he really is and so to make no image that limits the vision of who he really is. For when our vision is unlimited we know that more of God's love and compassion, justice and kindness and power lies before us to be discovered and to be enacted in our lives. There is yet more truth and light for us. And so we don't stop, satisfied with a false image, but we press on so that image can be formed fully in us who are made to bear it, as Christ bore it.

A broken world desperately needs people who are ready to live holy lives and bare the image of God as the children of God should. Even the creation itself, says Paul, is painfully and groaning in longing expectation that the children of God will come out into the open and live, as God's own child lived.

Now is not the time to sit back and be satisfied with where we are and what we have become. Now is the time to press on to take hold of the prize, for which God, in Christ, has taken hold of us.

Song

You are beautiful beyond description, too marvelous for words
Too wonderful for comprehension, like nothing ever seen or heard
Who can grasp Your infinite wisdom? Who can fathom the depth of Your love?
You are beautiful beyond description: Majesty, enthroned above

*And I stand, I stand in awe of You. I stand, I stand in awe of You
Holy God, to whom all praise is due, I stand in awe of You*

You are beautiful beyond description yet God crushed You for my sin
In agony and deep affliction; cut off that I might enter in
Who can grasp such tender compassion? Who can fathom this mercy so free?
You are beautiful beyond description: Lamb of God who died for me

*And I stand, I stand in awe of You. I stand, I stand in awe of You
Holy God, to whom all praise is due, I stand in awe of You*

A Prayer before Communion

“The heavens tell out the glory of God, heaven’s vault makes known his handiwork.” (Ps 19:1)

In this season of harvest, we come before you in praise and thanksgiving for everything you have given to us. We praise you for the complexity of the universe, for the wonder of creation. We praise you for the constant miracle of day and night, summer and winter, springtime and harvest, the regular cycle of life that we know and depend on. We praise you for the infinite beauty of our world.

We thank you for this lovely season of autumn, the final flourish of the flowers in rich tones of purple and scarlet, the trees slowly turning to gold and amber. We thank you for the rich resources of this planet and for all those who labour in different ways to make them accessible to us.

As we gather to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we give thanks for the harvest of fruit and grain, of wine and bread. They represent your love for us through the life and death and eternal life of your Son, Jesus Christ. We give our thanks for all that he brings to us, the gifts of grace, forgiveness and life in all its fulness. Give us hearts that are truly thankful, that we may rejoice in all the blessings you have showered upon us. In Christ’s name, Amen.

Communion

So break the bread for Christ is with us here *(we break bread and eat)*

So taste the wine, and feast on Jesus here *(we take wine and drink)*

A Prayer of Dedication and Intercession

Lord, in this meal you remind us that, in Christ you have reconciled us to yourself

So we dedicate ourselves to you, in worship once more.

To go and live with God and, as Christ to your broken world

And to join you in your work of reconciling all things in Heaven and Earth to you

We set aside all false images, so we may bear your image, before the world

Revealed to us in your law and in Christ your Son - lived out in us by your Holy Spirit:

So we pray for your world, bearing before you all nations in conflict, leaders in authority, communities divided and families in turmoil. We hold before you those who are dying and grieving, those who are sick and anxious, those who are depressed and lonely.

We pray for all those working and striving, in your Church and beyond, to live lives of holiness, to bring peace and justice, to advance knowledge to tackle disease and ignorance

We pray, in particular for those whose sufferings are causing us pain and anxiety and we name them before you... *(name those you love here)*

We pray, in these difficult days, that your people will not rest in complacency and comfort but press forward and lay hold of the life, for which you laid hold of us, through your Son, Christ our Lord. So may your Kingdom draw nearer and take root in our daily living and so we pray...

Our Father...

Hymn

We limit not the truth of God to our poor reach of mind,

By notions of our day and sect: crude, partial and confined.

Now let a new and better hope within our hearts be stirred:

The Lord hath yet more light and truth to break forth from His Word.

O Father, Son and Spirit, send us increase from above;

Enlarge, expand all Christian hearts to comprehend Thy love;

And make us all go on to know with nobler powers conferred:

The Lord hath yet more light and truth to break forth from His Word.

Benediction

We take hold of Christ and God takes hold of us, in Christ

So we press on by the power of His Holy Spirit

And we ask that the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit would strengthen us - Amen