

Sheffield United Reformed Churches - Team Ministry
Worship for individuals or families
Sunday 11th October 2020 at 10:30 am.

Call to worship

Loving God, you gather us together tenderly as a shepherd gathers their sheep; you bring us together to feed us and to strengthen us with your living water. In you we find peace. Help us to accept the invitation to come to you; make us willing to respond to your call, and ready to receive you now.

Hymn

This is the day. This is the day that the Lord has made. That the Lord has made.
We will rejoice. We will rejoice. And be glad in it. And be glad in it.
For this is the day that the Lord has made.
We will rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day. This is the day that the Lord has made!

Opening Prayers

God, as we gather here as your guests, as your children, seeking your face and knowing how much you care for us. Now that we have chosen to accept your invitation, may we feel the warmth of your welcome, may we taste the joy of your feast and may we respond with hearts full of praise. We come to worship, to praise you, but also to hear from you afresh today. Although we are separate, we know that we are together in your name.

Help us not just to listen to your voice but to obey. Help us not just to talk, but to put our words in to action, so that all we do is done in your name. We thank you for your creation and the power of your work within us, transforming us into your likeness.

Gracious and merciful God, we are sorry that we seldom live up to your expectations. We are sorry that our promise to follow your example and to share your never-ending love are too often promises made in vain.

So, forgive us, Lord. We are sorry that we do not always follow in your footsteps. We ask you to guide us.

Holy Spirit, as we come before you this morning we bring ourselves as we are, asking you to draw close to us. Grant us forgiveness for the thoughts, for the attitude, for the actions and for the conversations that did not reveal we are your children. Help us to forgive those who have hurt us. May we be people of mercy and grace in the same way we seek your mercy and grace for ourselves.

Reading: Philippians 4:1-9

Song Psalm 23 (Stewart Townsend's version of *The Lord's my Shepherd*)

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want; He makes me lie in pastures green. He leads me by the still, still waters, His goodness restores my soul.

And I will trust in you alone. And I will trust in you alone. For Your endless mercy follows me. Your goodness will lead me home.

Reading: Matthew 22:1-14

Reflection

My 4 year-old nephew absolutely loves to dress up in different costumes. He loves: dressing up as a doctor, dressing up as police officer, dressing up as Spiderman. I could go on.... And when he dresses up and puts on this clothing, he also models and takes on certain characteristics. For example, when he wears the white coat, complete with the stethoscope of a doctor, he emulates care and attention towards his patients. And, of course, becoming Spiderman involves seeking out justice as well as climbing the walls!

In the early church, when new converts to the church were baptised, they put on a new baptismal garment. The old clothing was cast aside, the new garment was worn. It was a symbol of claiming a new life. A new life of becoming a disciple who follows and emulates the Way of Jesus. And following and emulating Jesus was rooted in discipleship - deepening their own faith AND being able to share their faith with those around them.

Today I want to concentrate on how the story from the Gospel highlights how Jesus' followers then as well as now, are called to be disciples.

Matthew's Gospel was written in the 1st century, around 80AD. At this time, there were 2 key communities. There were communities of Jews who followed the laws and teaching of their Holy Book, the Torah. And also communities of Jews who followed the laws and teaching of the Torah AND also followed the Way of Jesus.

However, it is important to bear in mind that these were not two distinct communities, but communities in which, and through which, people knew each other and were even related to each other. And this meant that: neighbours were believing differently from one another; family members were believing differently from one another.

So, Jesus is asking His disciples as well as ALL of us, a key question: what do we do when people we love do not believe as we do?

I think that's a pressing question for our churches as more of our children and grandchildren choose not to come to church.

Too often, I think, we can feel a wee bit despondent. Perhaps, we remember a time when church was full. Maybe, we write off the possibility that it could be again. Even, downplaying the possibility of our own efforts. But bear in mind, our God is right here in the midst of all of this, with us. Indeed, we are disciples of Jesus who *hear*, even in this parable, the Good News that God invites all, good and bad (Matthew 22:10), because our God is a God of unconditional love.

We can, drawing on the words Paul writes in today's reading to the Philippians, "not worry about anything" – including when our loved ones do not believe as we do. Rather we can, in Paul's words: "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let [our] requests be made known to God."

Indeed, when we pray for our loved ones - we put aside whether they believe or not. We pray for their joys and disappointments. We pray for their worries and fears. We pray for their whole lives. And in so doing, I wonder: Could we share with them that we pray? Could we share why we pray? Could we open ourselves to their questions, concerns? Could we share our own? Sharing our faith is discipleship.

The Dutch priest and professor, Henri Nouwen declares that: "Prayer requires that we stand in God's presence with open hands, naked and vulnerable, proclaiming to ourselves and to others that

without God we can do nothing. As disciples, we find not some but all of our strength, hope, courage, and confidence in God.”

The heart of discipleship - is rooted in deepening our faith AND being able to share our own faith. As disciples we are called not to cram our faith down another’s throat, but instead simply to offer an invitation to come and see what God is still doing in and through Jesus and in the community of disciples who have chosen to follow him.

Just like the king who provided his guests with wedding robes in our parable from the Gospel of Matthew this morning, God looks to each one of us to model our discipleship - by deepening our faith and being able to share our faith.

Perhaps one way, although not the only way, to share our faith is to explain why we choose to belong to a church community. How did you come to be part of this church? Why do we go to worship on a Sunday? Why do we go to the coffee morning on a Saturday?

Studies have shown that the key factor influencing folk to attend a church for the first time is a personal invitation. It’s not the size or reputation of the church; it’s not the beauty or simplicity of the building; it’s not the amazing technology used in the Zoom service; it’s not the service times, style of worship, or quality of the music; it’s not even the Ministers! (Sorry Zaidie and Simon! - *Editor’s note: we don’t mind!!*)

All those things have value. But the number one, the very top, reason people give for coming to a church for the first time is that someone invited them personally. Which means that the future of the church depends greatly on ordinary, everyday Christians summoning the courage to invite someone to come and see what they have found in the community of the faithful that is their congregation.

I wonder what we would invite people to here in Sheffield? From my view as someone who is new to this community, I could offer a number of invitations: I invite you to participate in the friendly and caring coffee mornings. I invite you to all the people and situations that we pray for. I invite you to experience the vibrant Junior Church.

I wonder what each of you could say if you were to invite someone? Have a wee think. Perhaps, talk about it over coffee later. I said earlier that the future of the church may rest on our ability to invite others to come and see and share what we have found in our congregations.

My view is that the future of the church is without a doubt in God’s life-giving hands. And the same Spirit who descended on Jesus at Baptism is still working among us. Indeed, the Spirit that inspired Jesus’ first disciples and who reached out through their efforts to others, who is still offering all kinds of people, all over the world, an invitation and creating in them the desire to accept.

As we go out this week, I encourage us, to pray and act, to invite folk and to live out our callings as disciples who both follow as well as encourage others to follow Jesus’ Way.





Prayers of Intercession

God of the banquet, your desire is that all be welcomed to your table to share in the feast, yet the reality is that many often are, or feel, excluded. For those excluded through poverty, we pray for fairness. For those excluded by their gender, we pray for equality.

For those excluded because of their sexual orientation, we pray for acceptance. For those excluded because of faith or religion, we pray for understanding. For those excluded because of their ethnicity, we pray for justice.

God of the banquet, your desire is that all be welcomed to your table to share in the feast – guide and encourage us to help make this a reality.

Lord, we pray for your peace for those who are burdened with stress and anxiety. Come into our turmoil, and may your presence give strength and calmness. May your peace, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Lord, we pray for your peace for those who suffer from the wounds violence and hatred. We remember those who are ill, in hospital (we name those in our hearts). May they/we know healing, and be inspired by the hope of your kingdom. Lord, we pray for your love for all who bear old grudges or bitter hatreds, held and nurtured over generations. Wash away the memory of hurt and neglect, that they/we may know unity and wholeness.

Send your peace, Lord, which we may think, act and speak harmoniously. Take away our selfishness, so that we can share the joys, and feel the sorrows, of our neighbours. May your peace, which passes all understanding rest and remain with us. All these prayers we bring together in the prayer, Jesus taught his Disciples... **Our Father...**

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 your people 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

May the beauty of God be reflected in your eyes, the love of God be reflected in your hands, the wisdom of God be reflected in your words, and the knowledge of God flow from your heart. And may the blessing of God Almighty Creator, Son and Holy Spirit. Rest upon you and dwell within you. This day and evermore. Amen.

