

Sheffield United Reformed Churches
Team Ministry worship for individuals or families

Sunday 21st February 2021 at 10:30 am
First Sunday in Lent - *Church Action on Poverty Sunday*

Welcome

We live in tough times. The past few months have highlighted the inequalities that sweep too many people into poverty.

But we have also been reminded of the values that matter most: mutuality, compassion and community. As we journey forward together, we have the chance to do things differently.

If we are to build a society in which everyone can live a full life, free from poverty, we must ensure the voices of people who are struggling to make ends meet are heard.

Let us join together with Churches across the country in prayer, giving and action on **Church Action on Poverty Sunday**.

Let us share a vision for a society founded on compassion and justice, where all people are able to exercise dignity, agency and power.

Call to worship

Come together virtually to be God's people. Come together and be yourselves.

Bring to God our joys and our struggles. Bring to God our hopes and our fears.

Come together to be God's people, and let us worship the living God.

Hymn R&S 95

God is Love: let heaven adore him; God is Love: let earth rejoice;

Let creation sing before him, and exalt him with one voice.

He who laid the earth's foundation, He who spread the heavens above,

He who breathes through all creation, he is Love, eternal Love.

God is Love: and He enfoldeth; all the world in one embrace;

With unfailing grasp he holdeth every child of every race.

And when human hearts are breaking under sorrow's iron rod,

Then they find that self-same aching deep within the heart of God.

Prayer of Approach, Thanksgivings and Confession

Loving, faithful God, your love is absolute, your promises irrevocable.

We look up after a shower of rain, marvelling at the colourful beauty of your rainbow – a reminder of your promise and faithfulness to all generations.

Wherever we happen to be – wilderness, mountain or valley bottom – your Holy Spirit is with us.

We adore you, loving, faithful God.

New Wineskins, Lord Jesus, the fabric of our society has been patched many times, and yet still there are holes the places where the poor and the vulnerable struggle to exist.

As we face a future in which virus, climate and politics threaten deeper gashes in the web of community, we pray that you will guide us to create a new garment of justice, so that those who suffer now may join with all in drinking the new wine of your love in the fresh wineskins of a changed world.

We ask this in your name. (*Nick Jowett*)

We thank you, faithful God, for your patience, provision and power; for your tenderness, trust and triumph; for your security and strength; for your compassion and wisdom.

We thank you, Lord, that through your grace and mercy, the blessings of faith, and your covenant love, you equip, teach and guide us as we traverse today's world, ever mindful of your steadfast love.

God, we are sorry for the times when we have been slow to respond to the needs of our neighbours, especially to those who have been more vulnerable. We pledge ourselves to the service of those who have been hit hardest by the pandemic: poorer communities; the Black, Asian and ethnic minority community; those on the frontline of dealing with the public; those who have lost their livelihoods. God who forgives, accept the cry of our hearts.

To all who repent and turn to Christ, he says 'Follow me'. Amen

Hymn MP 806

Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair - Lord, in the suffering, this is our prayer
Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace - Sunrise to sunset, Your kingdom increase!

Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills; work for the craftsman, trade for their skills
Land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak; voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak

***Refrain:** God of the poor, friend of the weak, give us compassion we pray
Melt our cold hearts! Let tears fall like rain; come, change our love from a spark to a flame*

Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear; cities for sanctuary, freedoms to share
Peace to the killing-fields, scorched earth to green - Christ for the bitterness, His cross for the pain

Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams, plundered and poisoned; our future, our dreams
Lord, end our madness! Carelessness, greed! Make us content with the things that we need

***Refrain:** God of the poor...*

Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame until your justice burns brightly again
Until the nations learn of your ways; seek your salvation and bring you their praise

***Refrain:** God of the poor...*

Readings



Genesis 9:8-17– God promises and placed a bow in the sky as a sign

Psalms 25: 1 –10 – the paths of the Lord are steadfast

Mark 1:9 -15 – Jesus is baptised

1 Peter 3:18 -22 –Christ suffered once, for all - the righteous and the unrighteous

Reflection

Welcome to our first Sunday in Lent – the season of 40 days in the Christian calendar where we focus on reflection, preparation and fasting before the celebrations of Easter and new life. This Sunday our lectionary readings talk to us about the covenant which God made with Noah and commissioning of Jesus at his baptism.

As we explore the story of the flood which lasted 40 days we are given pictures of lots of water, many animals, the sky and a promise. These all link to our environment and our stewardship of the earth. As we mark this Sunday – which is also Church Action on Poverty Sunday we consider how God's promises are still true today and how Jesus' ministry to the poor is relevant today as our society struggles to address the underlying causes of poverty.

Over the past year we have seen rainbows everywhere and in all shapes and sizes as we have displayed them as a way of saying “Thank You” to the NHS. It has also been a sign of hope and healing. As it was to Noah and his family that God had made a promise and to all creation that the world would not be destroyed by flood. I believe that most traditions have a ‘flood story’ and one that reminds humanity that there is a God (Creator) who cares for all creation.

The last year we have seen fires and floods to maybe rival some of the rains which Noah had experienced. It seemed as if while one half of the world was burning the other half was under water. For us across Yorkshire, last month there were 98 flood warnings and a number of amber alerts. Thankfully some of were spared but others are still repairing the damage to their homes. In Genesis, God speaks to Noah and makes a covenant with him and the whole of creation, so when we see the bow in the clouds we remember the promise which God made and that gives us hope.

In the Gospel reading we share in Jesus’ baptism by recalling (if we are able to) our own baptism and our journey being part of the family of God. The baptism, then, was a visible sign of that God was still speaking. God affirmed who Jesus was in Mark’s narrative, the voice from heaven fulfils the purpose of identifying Jesus’ origin: he might come from Nazareth, a place of low honour, but he is God’s son. The divine voice makes an astonishing affirmation and Jesus comes out of the water filled with the Spirit and sets off on his ministry.

He completely renounced the old order and proved to be a genuine disciple, who followed his Father’s will. When he returned to Nazareth and he visited the synagogue he was handed the scroll and he read: *“The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD’s favour has come”*

He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. *Then he began to speak to them. “The Scripture you’ve just heard has been fulfilled this very day!”*

So, what are we doing to fulfil the scriptures today? Well, today as we reflect on the readings, reflect on next fortnight as Fair Trade and this Sunday as Church Action on Poverty, we are challenged to walk the way Jesus did and work to create a world which is described in the song written for this Sunday by Andrew Pratt: **A brave new world**. Andrew describes a brave new world where there is common wealth and a dream we will work to accomplish. Part of our work as a church is to support others who are actively working to fulfil this dream and in doing so we pray God’s kingdom come.

Church Action on Poverty enables people in poverty to speak out for themselves. We know that when people speak truth to power, they can make real change that tackles the root causes of UK poverty. In recent years, our campaigns have delivered real policy change on issues including Universal Credit, holiday hunger, and measuring food insecurity.

The past year has reminded us all of the values that matter most: mutuality, compassion and community. As we journey forward together, we have the chance to do things differently. If we are to build a society in which everyone can live a full life, free from poverty, we must ensure the voices of people who are struggling to make ends meet are heard. Please pray as your prayers can make a difference.

Music for Reflection R&S 712

All people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice;
him serve with mirth, his praise forth tell. Come ye before him and rejoice.

Know that the Lord is God indeed; without our aid he did us make;
we are his folk; he doth us feed, and for his sheep he doth us take.

Prayers of Intercessions *by Hazel Palmer*

Lord, we worship you as the Maker of heaven and earth. You love justice, so we come to you today to pray for people who are short of money. Some of us are struggling financially ourselves; others are better off. But all of us have been made in your image. If we have forgotten that, help us remember. Then ...Help us move forward in your light.

Lord, give us justice for the poor.

Even before Covid-19, people were poor for seemingly various reasons: being unemployed, in low-paid jobs, on zero-hours contracts or being sick or disabled. But behind all these differences we see policies like allowing unjust pay and working conditions, cuts to Government grants to councils, lower benefits and delayed payments. We pray for generosity, not judgement. Help us move forward in your light.

Lord, give us justice for the poor.

We don't believe food banks are the answer. We need a system with payments that give dignity and freedom from fear: fear of hunger, of being unable to pay bills, of being evicted – a proper social security system. To do this, we want a voice that expresses our needs and is listened to by politicians. We need a way of doing things founded on fresh thinking and the real needs of poor people. Help us move forward in your light.

Lord, give us justice for the poor.

Help the churches to pray for and support those in need. We pray for the young, for the old, for those with children and for the sick. For people with disabilities, we ask especially for recognition and respect for all kinds of disabilities, whether physical or mental and whether visible or not. We bring all these people to you because you are concerned about them, as Jesus was when he was here in the body. Help us move forward in your light.

Lord, give us justice for the poor.

O God, before you all empires must fall, all tyranny be overthrown, all injustice put right; open our eyes to the true cost of following you, open our minds to the imperial legacy of our lands, our institutions, our church, hidden in plain sight around us, that we may truly take up our cross, and resist the might of emperor and usurper, so that your people might be free.

God, we pray you'll transform our country so it's more like your kingdom of justice, peace and joy. May the hungry be fed, the homeless be housed, the sick and disabled be treated with compassion, and the marginalised taken into the mainstream. May we be empowered by the Holy Spirit. We ask all these things through Jesus Christ our Saviour - Amen

Our Father ...

Hymn R&S 647

In Christ there is no east or west, in him no south or north,
but one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth.
In Christ shall true hearts everywhere, their high communion find.
His service is the golden cord close binding humankind.

Join hands, then, people of the faith, whate'er your race may be.
All children of the living God are surely kin to me.
In Christ now meet both east and west, in him meet south and north.
All Christly souls are joined as one throughout the whole wide earth.

Blessings

Creator God, you made us in your image to be your people, wherever we go.

You made a covenant with us and all of creation. Thank you for the bow.

As we reflect on what we have heard, wherever we find ourselves, help us know that you are with us – guiding, revealing and sustaining us as we work to support others and bring about change.

So may the blessing of God the Creator, Jesus our Saviour and Holy Spirit who comforts us, hold us together now and always - Amen