

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

Sunday 7th March 2021 at 10:30 am - 3rd Sunday in Lent

Call to worship

Lent calls us to journey, this and every day,
following Jesus wherever he leads us.
Lent calls us to worship together, to hear the good news.
Lent calls us to respond to the good news
to bring Jesus' love and justice to all we meet.
Lent calls us to journey with God.
Let us worship God, who walks with us, this and every day.

Hymn The heavens declare Thy glory, Lord R&S 673

The heavens declare Thy glory, Lord; In every star Thy wisdom shines;
But when our eyes behold Thy Word, We read Thy name in fairer lines.

Sun, moon, and stars convey Thy praise, Round the whole earth, and never stand;
So when Thy Truth began its race, It touched and glanced on every land.

Nor shall Thy spreading Gospel rest, Till through the world Thy Truth has run;
Till Christ has all the nations blest, That see the light, or feel the sun.

Great Sun of Righteousness, arise, Bless the dark world with heavenly light;
Thy Gospel makes the simple wise; Thy laws are pure, Thy judgements right.

Thy noblest wonders here we view, In souls renewed and sins forgiven:
Lord, cleanse my sins, my soul renew, And make Thy Word my guide to Heaven."

Prayer of Approach, Thanksgivings 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 20:1-17 - The Ten Commandments

Psalm 19 - For the director of music. A psalm of David.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25 - Christ Crucified Is God's Power and Wisdom

John 2:13-22 – Jesus Cleanses the Temple

Hymn

Jesus Christ is waiting, Waiting in the streets; No one is his neighbour, All alone he eats.
Listen, Lord Jesus, I am lonely too.
Make me, friend or stranger, Fit to wait on you

Jesus Christ is raging, Raging in the streets, Where injustice spirals And real hope retreats.
Listen, Lord Jesus, I am angry too.
In the Kingdom's causes, Let me rage with you.

Jesus Christ is healing, Healing in the streets; Curing those who suffer, Touching those he greets.
Listen, Lord Jesus, I have pity too.
Let my care be active, Healing just like you.

Jesus Christ is dancing, Dancing in the streets, Where each sign of hatred He, with love, defeats.
Listen, Lord Jesus, I should triumph too.
On suspicion's graveyard - Let me dance with you.

Reflection

Tomorrow, 8 March 2021, is International Women's Day. This year's theme is "Choose To Challenge." So, what does that mean? It means each and every one has a part to play. We can all choose to challenge and call out gender bias and inequality. We can all choose to seek out and celebrate women's achievements. Collectively, our words and actions mean that we can all help create an inclusive world.

History has shown over and over again that women and, of course, men have recognised and acknowledged injustice and inequality. And over and over again, they choose to challenge.

Malala Yousafzai was shot by the Taleban for daring to go school...yet she chose to challenge.

Rosa Parks was told her skin colour made her unfit to sit in the front of the bus... yet she chose to challenge. The Bronte sisters were told women couldn't publish successful novels.. yet they chose to challenge. And men who choose to challenge include tennis player Andy Murray to Prince Harry, both of whom are vocal opponents of sexism. I'm sure you can all think of further examples from your own life and throughout the world.

In our Gospel reading from John today, we are presented with a Jesus who is also like these women and men. A Jesus who sees injustice and inequality. A Jesus who chooses to challenge. In the story in John, we are presented with a very dramatic scene in the Temple. In Jesus' culture, the temple was the heart of the city of Jerusalem. The cultural and spiritual foundation of the Jewish nation. And the home, the dwelling-place on earth, of Yahweh/God.

And yet, as we see in our reading from John's gospel this morning, Jesus emphasises that the moneylenders have turned the temple into a marketplace. At this time, there was a marketplace at the temple. The marketplace was there to enable devout Jews to purchase animals for sacrifice and to change the Imperial coin for the local currency with which to make such purchases.

So, why did Jesus become so angry? At this time, there was a surcharge for exchanging money into currency which was suitable for temple offerings. And this surcharge was so excessive, so unreasonable that many were not able to afford to encounter God in that place. For those who were in a more financially secure place, perhaps the practice was no more than a minor nuisance. Or maybe, for some it was no barrier at all. Perhaps, they had become so accustomed, or even apathetic, to how things were, that they didn't even see it anymore, let alone question or choose to challenge it.

But Jesus saw it for what it was. Jesus saw it and recognised how it was impacting on those most vulnerable and marginalised in society. And Jesus chooses to challenge. So today we encounter him with a whip made of cords in his hands --- seeking to make right what had become so terribly wrong. When Jesus drives the animals out of the temple, overturns the tables of the moneychangers, and demands the end of buying and selling, he is really announcing the end of this way of relating to God. God is no longer only and exclusively available and accessible through and in the temple.

Given that John's account was written well after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Romans, Jesus' insistence – and perhaps reassurance – to his community that they would find God in Christ outside rather than inside the Temple must have been really powerful.

John's Gospel is written in the second century. He is writing to a specific community of people. A community of Jewish-Christians that have been ostracised for their belief in Jesus.

Or more specifically, they have been thrown out of their synagogue. Which is to say they have been separated from their entire social, religious, and communal life. They have become outsiders. The excluded. The marginalised. Have you ever been excluded from something? Or abandoned? Or left behind? Or marginalised? Or do you know communities who have experienced this? Then you know what John's readership feels like.

In this context, notice again those actions of Jesus. Notice again Jesus' actions recognising that they were written for a community that has been kicked out, excluded and marginalised. Notice again how he chooses to challenge. This story of Jesus in the Temple highlights the inclusiveness of the Gospel. Reminding us that we are continually being invited to create a more inclusive community, country and world.

So, we are left with the task of asking ourselves: who is marginalised in our society today? Who is it that is challenging an understanding of what makes us a community of faith? And who is it that is challenging us to be more compassionate and inclusive in our society, our country, our world? I pray that we can ask these questions of ourselves and each other.

This Lent, we are being invited to walk the streets of Sheffield and pray for our neighbours, homes, schools and businesses. And if we are unable to go out and walk, we can pray from home. I wonder, could our prayers include those in society who are marginalised? People who can feel excluded because of physical/mental ill health, gender, race and sexuality, being homeless or unemployed. In so doing, through our walking and praying, we can choose to challenge inequality and injustice.

As we go out this week and throughout Lent, I invite us to recognise, acknowledge and articulate the ways we can choose to challenge, and in so doing, God's kingdom may come.

Communion with Prayers of Intercession

Since earliest times, human community has included the sharing of gifts and food.

Since earliest times, Christian communities have shared bread and wine to remember the gift and gospel of Jesus who discerned the Wisdom of love amidst the temptation and trial of fear.

Here today, Jesus invites us to his table.

At this table Jesus invites us all to be his guests;
offering a meal to nourish our minds and hearts
offering companionship to transform our lives and world.

Let us hear the story of the meal Jesus hosted in the Upper Room:

On the night which Jesus was betrayed, he sat at supper with his disciples. While they were eating he took a piece of bread, said a blessing, broken it and gave it to them with the words:

"This is my body, broken for you. Do this to remember me."

Later on he took a cup of wine, saying, "This cup is God's new Covenant, sealed with my life. Drink from it all of you, to remember me."

We give you our deepest thanks for bringing us round this table,
where you offer your life to nourish our minds and heart
where you offer your presence to transform our world
where you offer your wisdom amidst the maze of life.

As we celebrate the richness of your table,
we cannot forget the poverty in our lives and world.

We pray for the causes of poverty including lack of employment
and education, debt which affects people here in Sheffield and across the world.

We give thanks for this good bread
and bring also hunger in bodies, minds and hearts.
We pray for those in our community, those we love, who need strength and help at this time.

We give thanks around this table for your peace
And we bring also war and violence.

We pray for:

those in Israel/Palestine, Syria and where wars continue
those in the Central African Republic amid clashes between armed groups and security forces.
those in Myanmar who are trying to survive a military coup.

We give thanks for this cup of restoration
and bring also brokenness.

We pray for those in our community, those we love, who are ill, in hospital or undergoing treatment.

We give thanks round this table for the sharing of companionship
and bring also isolation and division.

We pray for those who are experience acute loneliness in these Covid-19 times.

We give thanks round this table for the communion of saints
and bring also grief for loved ones lost.

We pray for those in our community, those we love who are grieving and nearing the end of life.

Living God, may the hope and love revealed in this bread and wine, nourish and transform our lives and world.

Gracious Spirit, fill this bread and wine with the fullness of Jesus,

Gracious Spirit, fill us with the fullness of Jesus

That in receiving this meal, we may offer ourselves to live and share the gifts and gospel of Jesus in our lives and world.

Let us eat and drink together.

Shall we pray...

Holy One

In this bread and wine, in this memory and vision,

You have put your life into our hands,

Now we put our lives into yours:

Take us

Shake us and

Remake us

That we may walk in the way of Jesus

Empowered by your love

Every day, starting now.

Amen.

Hymn Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult R&S 355

Jesus calls us o'er the tumult of our life's wild, restless sea;
day by day his sweet voice soundeth, saying "Christian, follow me."

Jesus calls us from the worship of the vain world's golden store,
from each idol that would keep us, saying "Christian, love me more."

In our joys and in our sorrows, days of toil and hours of ease,
still he calls, in cares and pleasures, "Christian, love me more than these."

Benediction

May the paths that we walk
be guided by the Creator
accompanied by the Son
inspired by the Holy Spirit.

And may the blessing of God,
Creator, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with us all
now and forevermore.

Amen