

Sheffield United Reformed Churches
Team Ministry an act of devotion for individual or families
Sunday 6th June 2021 at 10:30 am
1st Sunday after Trinity

Opening words Psalm 138

I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise;
I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and
your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything.
On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.
All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O Lord, for they have heard the words of your mouth.

They shall sing of the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord.
For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he perceives from far away.
Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you
stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me.
The Lord will fulfil his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake
the work of your hands.

Opening Hymn All are Welcome (Let us build a house)

Let us build a house where love can dwell, and all can safely live, a place where saints and
children tell how hearts learn to forgive. Built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of faith and
vault of grace; here the love of Christ shall end divisions. All are welcome, all are welcome, all are
welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where prophets speak, and words are strong and true, where all God's
children dare to seek to dream God's reign anew. Here the cross shall stand as witness and as
symbol of God's grace; here as one we claim the faith of Jesus. All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.

Prayers of Approach, Thanksgiving and Confession

We light three lights in this season of the Trinity of love: God above us, God beside us, God
around us; the beginning, the end, the everlasting One. Creator God, you create and sustain all
living beings, by the power of your unconditional, all-encompassing love.

We give thanks and praise for your creativity this morning, the risk and imagination you
demonstrated in making such wild diversity in the world: the rhinoceros and the dragonfly, the
sunflower and the oak tree, the Himalayas and the spider's web, the earthworm and the human
brain. And we celebrate the mystery and joy which is found in each one of us, made in the image
of God.

We also recognise the times when we have failed to treat one another with love and respect.
When we have said hurtful words or perpetuated injustice by what we have done, or what we have
failed to do. So, we come asking for forgiveness. Let us listen to the words of Jesus, words that we
can trust: "Yours sins are forgiven." Merciful God, empower us to live our lives embodying your
"Good News" to everyone we encounter. We this prayer in and through the name of Jesus, our
Saviour. Amen

Readings



Psalm 138 – The LORD will fulfil his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever.

Mark 3:20-35- Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.

Corinthians 4:13-5:1- Do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day

Reflection

Family. There is a well-known saying that: ‘Family comes in all shapes and sizes.’ Our families often form our earliest memories, shape our first dreams and aspirations; teach us how to live with others and influence our relationships and behaviour.

In our Gospel reading from Mark this morning, we are presented with a really vivid and action-packed story about family. Imagine the scene, a massive crowd is following Jesus and the disciples. A crowd who are jostling for position: eager to hear what Jesus has to say, eager to see what he will do. And in the midst of the crowd, the religious leaders, the scribes are present: checking to see what Jesus will say, checking to see what Jesus will do. Checking that Jesus does not say or do anything that is contrary to the religious teachings and laws of the day. Jesus’ family appear: apprehensive about what Jesus will say, apprehensive about what He will do.

Did you notice the words from the reading, referring to His family: ‘they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.”

They are deeply concerned that His preaching, teaching, and miracle-working are signs of erratic behaviour. Because they loved him, to be sure, but also to protect him and the family name.

When the crowd says that his family is summoning him from outside the crowded building, Jesus answers with a deeply shocking statement: “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers? ... Look, here [these people seated around me] are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does God’s will is my brother, sister and mother.”

In Jesus’ culture, where responsibility, identity, stability, and opportunity were all so bound up with kinship structures, Jesus’ pronouncement of a new family would have been deeply shocking. And yet, it also can bring great joy to some, especially those followers who find themselves estranged, rejected or excluded from their own families of origin.

And today, there are two ways of reading, two ways of hearing Jesus’s words. We can read and hear these words as rejection. A rejection of the family who raised him, who protected him. And yet, there is also another way of reading and hearing Jesus’ words. Rather than rejection, can we hear these words as an expansion? An expansion of how we define family – an expansion of who is included, an expansion of who is loved and cared for. In this context, listen once again to those words Jesus speaks to the crowd:

“Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

Indeed, they express, as did Jesus with his life, his teaching, his example, and in these words, that whatever our own experience of family, whether it is a source of joy or sorrow, pleasure or pain, or a mixture of both, we are all, each one of us, part of God's family. A family in which love reaches out far beyond biological ties and genetic kinship, a family in which all are wanted, all are welcome, all are longed for and loved, all are cherished and chosen, and all can truly belong.

Can you imagine how earth-shattering, how life-changing these words, this message are for individuals and groups in Jesus' society who have been rejected?

Can you imagine how earth-shattering, how life-changing these words, this message continues to be for communities, for individuals who are rejected today?

With this in mind, when you are lesbian or gay, rejection by biological family, is still a deeply painful and living reality. Sometimes the response of your family, when you come out as gay, is expulsion from home, exclusion from those you love and care for. Sometimes the reaction of your family, may result in a rather grudging toleration instead of affirmation and celebration of your true self. A person who is made in the image of God, made in and for love.

I wonder, who in our church, in our society and in our world today experiences rejection?

I wonder, who in in our church, in our society and in our world today *could* experience inclusion?

As we go out this week, I fervently pray that we can ask these questions of ourselves and each other.

Hymn A Place at the Table

For everyone born, a place at the table, for everyone born, clean water and bread, a shelter, a space, a safe place for growing, for everyone born, a star overhead, and God will delight when we are creators of justice and joy, compassion and peace: yes, God will delight when we are creators of justice, justice and joy!

For woman and man, a place at the table, revising the roles, deciding the share, with wisdom and grace, dividing the power, for woman and man, a system that's fair, For young and for old, a place at the table, a voice to be heard, a part in the song, the hands of a child in hands that are wrinkled, for young and for old, the right to belong

For just and unjust, a place at the table, abuser, abused, with need to forgive, in anger, in hurt, a mind-set of mercy, for just and unjust, a new way to live, For everyone born, a place at the table, to live without fear, and simply to be, to work, to speak out, to witness and worship, for everyone born, the right to be free,

Communion – Jesus invites us all around the table where God intends for us to be nourished, this is a time when Christ can make us new. So come you who hunger and thirst, for a deeper faith, a better life and a fairer world.

Prayers of Intercession

O God beyond us, lead us forward to pray. O God beside us, teach us gently to pray. O God within us, still our hearts to pray. O God, our world is crying out for peace. We pray for your children in Palestine/Israel. We give thanks that Israel and Hamas agreed to a ceasefire after 11 days of fighting. We pray for a lasting peace where abundant life can be experienced by all.

O God, our world is crying out for equality. We pray for your children in India. We pray that somehow more vaccines might be made and delivered more quickly. May we declare that all need

protection and provision? O God, our world is crying out for hospitality. We pray for your children who are desperately fleeing conflict, persecution and searching for a better life. We give thanks for practical assistance in terms of shelter, food and clothing. May we acknowledge that all deserve dignity and respect?

O God, our world is crying out for justice. We pray for your children who are denied compassion because of sexuality, race or gender. May we recognise that all are made in your image. Living God, Loving Saviour, Empowering Spirit, we lift up to you these prayers with the deep knowledge that you hear us and are working with us to create your Kingdom of justice and joy.

May the power of your Spirit drive our mission, to see you in the lives of others? May we share your love with one another and build your church to be a reflection of the life of your Son Jesus Christ. May your life giving Spirit mould and shape the church helping it to build community in the dark places, where your light shines, your love is shown and your compassion recognised; by those of faith and no faith.

May your Spirit be at the heart of all we do? Use the power of the wind to energise, create and refresh our relationships that we may continue to transform your world, honour your creation and redeem our streets.

May the energy of the Pentecost flames, cleanse, and renew all that is broken in our lives, that from the ashes may come the beauty of resurrection, where we are made whole and humanity and creation woven together as one.

Living God, in lives overshadowed by sadness, loneliness and fear, may the gentle breeze of your Spirit stir hearts to awaken your presence within them. Through the breeze that bears your grace and compassion, touch hearts that they may feel the warmth and power of the flames of your Spirit.

Loving and life giving God, Let us say the Lord's Prayer...

Closing Hymn Let there be love shared among us R&S 477

Let There Be Love Shared Among Us,
Let There Be Love In Our Eyes,
May Now Your Love Sweep This Nation,
Cause Us Oh Lord To Arise.

Give Us A Fresh Understanding
Of Brotherly Love That Is Real,
Let There Be Love Shared Among Us,
Let There Be Love.

Blessing

God of all life, you have called us as your family, and brought us together in doing your will. So may the blessing of our Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore.
Amen