

**Sheffield United Reformed Churches**  
**Team Ministry worship for individual or family**  
**Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2021 at 10:30 am - 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

**Call to worship**

Welcoming God, we come to you with open hearts and with open hands.  
We come with our faith and hope, and with our doubts and fears.  
Send your Holy Spirit to work among us, filling us and changing us  
To become more like Jesus. Come Holy Spirit

**Opening Hymn - MP 359**

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."

As, of old, apostles heard it by the Galilean lake,  
Turned from home and toil and kindred, leaving all for his dear sake.

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."

Jesus calls us; by thy mercies, Saviour, may we hear thy call,  
Give our hearts to thine obedience, serve and love thee best of all.

**Prayer**

Loving God, as always, we have many reasons to praise you and offer our thanks for countless blessings, both in good times and hard times.

Today, we praise you that our Sheffield Team Ministry is moving forward with a new team Minister and ask your blessing upon the whole team in all the churches, ordained and lay. We praise you for the faith that has inspired so much love, compassion, service, unity, mission, discipleship and hope in our churches.

We praise you for the love you have for us and the hope you bring to our individual lives.  
We praise you for the signs of your kingdom that we see in the churches and way beyond.  
We praise you for the world in all its stunning beauty. We praise you for all that you have given us.

And yet, our hearts feel sad when we think of the way the world is abused, and how easily we forget to be good stewards. We are sorry for such foolishness.

We are sorry when we have been the cause of disunity and disharmony; when we have spoken in ways that are unworthy of the name "Christian"; when we have failed to turn the other cheek and refused to go the extra mile for peace; when we have been full of pride rather than grace and humility; when we have preferred to criticise others rather than address our own failings. We are sorry for such foolishness.

Help us to build a better world, to care for all creation, to love with a Christ-like passion, to be good disciples, building communities in which we truly love our neighbours with a generous and unlimited love. We know that you are a patient and generous God, slow to anger and quick to forgive. May we know, as we turn to you in repentance and sorrow, that we are forgiven and set free to live the better way. May we know that the past is gone, and that you invite us to a future of hope, with you. May your kingdom come. Amen.

We bring all our prayers together in the words Jesus taught his disciples... **Abba Father, who art in Heaven...**

## Readings



**1Kings 8: 22-43** - O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath...

**Psalms 34: 15-22** - The LORD is near to the broken hearted, and saves the crushed in spirit...

**John 6:56-69** - Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom we can go? You have the words of eternal life...."

**Ephesians 6:1-20** - Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power...

## Reflection

Have you ever had a complaint made against you? It is what we all dread: finding out that someone has made a complaint about you. ...and worse bit is you have no idea what it is about. Most people will be asking themselves what have I done – especially if it is not the first one.

Here are some things you may have considered at the time.... Not to have a knee-jerk reaction as news that someone has made a complaint will come as a shock. Keep calm. Start your own investigation as you need to get some information. Speaking from experience (say no more) It is hard to get the details due to issues around confidentiality and one has to wait until that dreaded letter arrives. If you were in a union you would contact them and appraise them of your situation. ..

My apologies if that short introduction brought back some very unhappy memories. Today I would like us to consider how Jesus handled his situation when a specific complaint reached his heart. In his case he didn't need to wait for the letter to arrive. Let's set the context for us today as I am sure Jesus will be using it in his defence.

If this was a play we could divide it into two parts (Simon is taking note here for the next production) Part I: Jesus answers the criticism from the religious leaders. Jesus responds to complaints about "this teaching" by pointing to the whole story from cross to resurrection and ascension. Part II: Jesus asks whether The Twelve "wish" to remain with him; and then the dramatic ending where the story continues, as Jesus know that betrayal and denial are yet to come. Do you still wish to remain?

John our Gospel writer invites us to continue as this journey is no- where near an ending.

Let me take you back to the last four Sundays as this bread eating, life giving blessing has been going on awhile. So many say that maybe it would have been easier if John has just written the Eucharist narrative. I think John wanted to show us how important the presence of Jesus is to our unity, our oneness and being connected through the Spirit.

Week 1 – With the crowd, we had the feeding of the five thousand and more (women and of course children) as it was the little boy who demonstrated love. Jesus then blessed it and showed us the economy of life – a little can go a long way. Let us remind our government as they decide to cut the overseas aid budget. Week 2 – Jesus says the famous "I am the bread" and asked us to believe.

Week 3 – Local boy causes a stir. I knew him when ... He is now talking about coming down from the Father in heaven, giving eternal life. He knows our story and he is saying he is the living bread. Week 4 – Smaller crowd in the Synagogue, Jesus takes things even deeper and talks about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink (verse 55).

Before, Jesus answered criticism from the religious leaders. Now, the complaining comes from those who have been following him. Those who decide to leave attribute their decision to "this teaching". Jesus said "feed on me" is, in fact, at the heart of the offense and the complaint

Many of the disciples turn back and leave-off following Jesus. Peter shows that the Twelve have been reacting in receptive ways to Jesus' teaching (remaining, hearing, knowing, and believing) Because Jesus knows the secret thoughts of those around him, he is aware that his disciples are complaining about him. "Does this offend you?" he asks. The question implies that, yes, **this Jesus offends**. However, the next question seems more open-ended: "Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?" You have seen, you have tasted now what would you make about the Son of Man going up into heaven?

In other words, the decision to leave (or stay) is arguably premature without the full understanding of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit

While Jesus might be trying to sort through the nature of the difficulty mentioned in the complaint his explanation seems to take us to another level: "It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life". Let us cast our minds back to the conversation Jesus had with Nicodemus. No one can **see** the kingdom of God, without being born from above. No one can **enter** the kingdom of God without being born of water and of Spirit.

The words Jesus speaks are in unity with the life-giving spirit of the real or true bread from heaven. Human beings are born anew not by the will of the flesh or of the will of human beings, but by the will of God. Jesus' question to The Twelve: "Do you also wish to go away?"

The Twelve remain because they have made an informed (and human) decision. We could digress here and look at being called / election and being chosen. Which wins? Divine election or human decision? That is maybe for another time. Today is about where we are on our journey together. As we consider going back to our buildings some people will not return and we will be heart broken. The Bible tells us that there is lots of information and things out there that will draw us away. So many arguments and counter arguments. Where do you stand this morning? Its reasonable (and human) to doubt but where you need to be is strong in your belief in God who feeds us the true bread. The drama of belief and unbelief continues to be acted out in the world of the living.

Maybe when we read this text, we want to say that we would be with Peter and with The Twelve, and we would continue with Jesus. Rock-solid with Jesus. When the roll is called up yonder, we will be counted among the saints. Or perhaps when we read this text, we want to say that it's okay to doubt, that it's honest to doubt. After all, Peter who spoke so movingly a moment ago in our reading, will a few chapters hence speak in a very different way.

Or maybe the belief or unbelief that we claim isn't the point. Authenticity in the fellowship of believers seems to be important point in this reading. If we look back to last week's reading in 1 Kings 3:5 as Solomon prayed God appeared to him in a dream and said, "Ask what I should give you" So this morning, are we feeding on that bread of life? What do you desire from God? **Amen**

### **Song for Reflection - MP 261**

I am the Bread of life, those who comes to Me shall not hunger,  
Those who believe in Me shall not thirst.  
No one can come to Me, unless the Father draw him....

*And I will raise them up, and I will raise them up! And I will raise them up, on the last day.*

The bread that I will give is My flesh for the life of the world.  
And those who eat of this bread, they shall live for ever, they shall live for ever...

*And I will raise them up, and I will raise them up! And I will raise them up, on the last day.*

## **Prayers of Intercession**

Loving God, we turn our thoughts to the world and all its people. A world where there is so much distress at this time. We pray for the people of Afghanistan, facing great turmoil, fear and uncertainty. We dare to ask that the new leaders of the nation may be filled with a desire to build a peaceful nation in which all people: women, men and children, old and young may be treated with respect and honour.

We pray that the nation will not become a source of increasing terrorism in the world. We pray for Haiti, having to face yet another natural disaster in the midst of poverty. May you inspire compassion and practical help for those whose lives have been torn apart yet again. We pray too for those places where climate change has led to fires, droughts, flood, storms and so much destruction. May you bless the people of the world with the wisdom to be better stewards of your creation. May the world's leaders learn to care about the future and not just their immediate popularity. We pray for all around the world who are victims of violence, oppression, poverty and injustice.

**May your kingdom come.**

We turn our thoughts to our nation, ill at ease with itself in many ways. May you bless the nation and help us to build a welcoming, peaceful, loving, caring and compassionate society, wherein all are valued. May the forces of division and hate be overcome by unity and love.

**May your kingdom come.**

We pray for all who are looking for work and those in fear of losing their jobs. We pray for those who are sick, lonely, tired, grieving or finding life hard. May you help us to build a world, a nation and a city that looks after the weakest and poorest, and cares for all in need.

**May your kingdom come.**

We pray for the church throughout the world, that it may seek and find ever-greater unity and humility. May we learn from many traditions and embrace our Christian sisters and brothers. May you bless the churches of the Sheffield Team Ministry and help us to be good disciples, building churches that are a sign of hope in our communities, where welcome is guaranteed, and friendship may flourish. Bless us with vision, unity and a clear mission in each location and across the city. Bless the ministers and members with all the gifts they need to serve you well.

**May your kingdom come.**

Gracious God, we pray for our families and friends, and for ourselves. May our faith grow deeper and stronger. May our passion for your gospel stir us into action. May you drive complacency, despondency and negativity from our hearts and minds and help us to see your kingdom in action. We turn to you, the source of eternal life.

**May your kingdom come. Amen.**

## **Closing Hymn - MP 272**

I have decided to follow Jesus; (repeat twice)  
No turning back, no turning back.

Tho' none go with me, I still will follow; (repeat twice)  
No turning back, no turning back.

The world behind me, the cross before me; (repeat twice)  
No turning back, no turning back.

## **Blessing**

Lord Jesus Christ, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,  
And we have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.

May the blessing of God our Maker, The bread of life through Jesus  
And the Spirit of truth .....  
Go with us into our community and the world. Amen