

worship notes



The Fifth Sunday after
Pentecost
10th July 2022
The Rev'd Phil Nevard

from the United Reformed Church

Call to Worship

God's Word is not too hard for us, nor is it too far away;

It is very near, in our mouths and in our hearts.

It does not lie in the far reaches of heaven;

It is very near, in our mouths and in our hearts.

It does not dwell beyond the sea;

It is very near, in our mouths and in our hearts.

Come, let us worship the Lord our God,

With heart, soul, strength, and mind.

(based on Deut. 30:11-14 and Luke 10:27)

Prayers of Approach

Creator God,

We take this day, as a special day, to celebrate the goodness of the world you have made, the world you sustain. The world teems with life and is filled with beauty, celebrating its creator. You have breathed your life into each one of us, made us in your image, called us to be your children.

We rejoice, and we are glad.

Saviour God,

We take this day, as a special day, to celebrate Jesus' rising from the dead. With joy in our hearts we can proclaim that he is risen! He shared our life and suffered our death so that we might share his life and his rising - conquering death. Because he lives, we too shall live!

We rejoice, and we are glad.

God-with-us,

We take this day, as a special day, to celebrate the coming of your Spirit, for you are not a God above and beyond us, but with us and in us. Your Spirit within us, we have a measure of your love, of your joy, of your peace, of your power to live as your children in the world.

We rejoice, and we are glad.

God of every day,

We take this day as a special day, forgive us when we take it as the only day to rejoice and be glad in all you have given, for Monday and Thursday, Tuesday and Friday, Wednesday and Saturday are your days too.

Help us to live as your children all the days of our lives. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

When we offer God our confession, we join the beautiful work of reconciliation, which begins with our reconciling with God. Trusting in our Partner in grace, let us make our confession, first in silent prayer.

(Silent confession)

Gracious and loving God, open our hearts so that we are able to admit to you the fullness of our lives – that which is beautiful and good, and that which is hurtful and hateful.

We confess that we do not follow Jesus in all that we do.

We love with condition.

We judge and condemn.

We cast the first stone;

We keep the logs in our own eyes;

We do not turn to You as the source of our healing.

Forgive us, we pray.

Forgive our sin, and empower us to be imitators of Christ in love and service. Amen.

Beth Merrill Neel on her blog, 'Hold Fast to What Is Good'.

Used with permission.

Words of Forgiveness

Friends in Christ, know this:

the mercy of God is from everlasting to everlasting,
and I remind you of this surpassing grace,
in Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

Alleluia! Amen.

Beth Merrill Neel on her blog, 'Hold Fast to What Is Good'.

Used with permission.

A couple of ideas for an all-age/children's address

1. Given the familiarity of this parable in most congregations, it would be good to find a way of telling it in such a way that some of the original shock value is recreated. Personally I'd resist "modernising" it as I remember from my childhood with readings such as "the parable of the good punk rocker" as this simply displays our prejudices! Using the ancient prejudices which are not alive or hurtful in our culture is probably a good thing!

I'd re-tell the story as is but change the ending as follows: "Later in the day, a Samaritan came walking down the road. He too noticed the man lying injured and half-dead in the ditch. He stopped, walked over to the wounded man, gave him a proper kicking and stole his belt."

You can be sure that children who had long-since drifted off as you were telling the story will notice, and will be falling over themselves to tell you that's wrong. It then gives you an opportunity to talk about how shocked and outraged the original listeners would have been.

2. An opportunity to use the psalm for the day, Psalm 25:1-10. The last verse says: "All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love..." Look up the synonyms of "steadfast" - there are loads of them - and use them in a long list to describe what God's love is like. Then look up the antonyms of "steadfast" and use them in a similar sentence to describe OUR love.

A Prayer of Illumination

Loving God, Spirit of Wisdom and Truth,
Break through our drowsiness,
Break through our stubborn-ness,

Break through our prejudice,
Break through our comfort-level,
Break open your Word
That our lives might be turned towards your Glory. Amen.

Readings

Deuteronomy 30:9-14 | St Luke 10:25-37

Sermon Notes

The Deuteronomy reading begins with a tricky section which seems to encourage a “prosperity gospel” approach to life. A preacher might choose to deal with this or ignore it. If ignoring it, then it might be best to omit those verses from what is read out in church. It’s not always helpful to read tricky verses that you then don’t deal with! I am more drawn to the second section and the poetic language used to try to get across the idea that what God is requiring of us is not impossibly distant - indeed it is as close as our lips and our hearts, what we say and what we do.

I think I might fashion a sermon which looks at the question, “Is God asking us to do the impossible?” I am sure most of our congregations have heard this question answered unhelpfully. I have heard at least two unhelpful approaches to this from the pulpit.

The first is the age-old idea that what God wants us to do is simple, but the Judaism ruined it all by making it all so complicated and wrapping God’s Word around with so many intricate and impossible laws and regulations that it all became a kind of slavery to a rule book and impossible for anyone to achieve except, perhaps, for a few religious experts who had the time and means to devote every second of their lives to living it out. This is, of course, right on the edge, if not deeply embedded in anti-semitism, and should be resisted.

The other is a similar idea, but without reference to Judaism, stating that the Gospel is simple in such a way that all decisions and choices are basically simple because they are fairly black and white. God’s word is clear and unambiguous and we just need to read it to find the right answer and do what God wants us to do. This, of course, works well until the moment we realise that life isn’t simple, that life has so many areas of nuanced greyness in between black and white, and we need a faith that is nuanced and complex enough to deal with it.

Deuteronomy reassures us that what God requires of us IS within our reach, living a Godly life IS achievable, and maybe the story of the good Samaritan helps us further. I think I would invite the congregation to inhabit the story and ask questions about which character they had chosen to identify with. It strikes me that you might hear the story differently depending on who you choose to identify with.

If you choose the Priest/Levite then the story might lead you down a path of examining the excuses YOU make and how valid they are. If you choose the Samaritan then the story might lead you down a path of imagining who the people you might help could be and hopefully to reflect on why it is you see yourself as the hero/helper. If you choose either of those, then there will always be a danger that it will lead you to unhelpfully divide up the world into Good Samaritans/Bad Jews or Good Ordinary People/Bad Religious People, which is not helpful.

I suspect few will choose to identify with the beaten up man lying in the ditch. I think I might dwell here a moment. How does the story feel if you are him? It makes us the vulnerable ones in need of help rather than the heroic ones dishing out salvation. Maybe the “simplicity” of faith or what God requires of us is not about always knowing what to do or how to act, but knowing that we are all broken and in need of help, and that however unlikely it may seem, God is the source of our salvation. The world remains complex and we will always be confused about details, but God reaching out to our broken-ness is constant, sure and simply true.

An Affirmation of Faith

We believe in God.
The God of all creeds, with all their truths.
But, above all, in the God
that rises from the dead
to become part of life.

We believe in the God that accompanies us along
every step of our path on this earth,
many times walking behind us, watching me and suffering with our mistakes,
other times walking beside us, talking to us and teaching us,
and other times walking ahead of us, guiding and marking our pace.

We believe in the God of flesh and blood, Jesus Christ,
the God who lived in our skin and tried on our shoes,
the God who walked in our ways, and knows of lights and shadows.
The God who ate and starved,
who had a home and suffered loneliness,
who was praised and condemned, kissed and spat on, loved and hated.
The God who went to parties and funerals,
the God who laughed and cried.

We believe in the God who is attentive today, who looks at the world
and sees the hatred that segregates, divides,
sets people aside, hurts and kills,
who sees the bullets piercing the flesh,
and the blood of innocent people flowing on the earth,
who sees the hand that dips into another's pocket,

stealing what somebody needs to eat,
who sees the judge that favours the highest bidder,
the truth and justice of hypocrites,
who sees the dirty rivers and the dead fish,
the toxic substances destroying the earth
and piercing the sky
who sees the future mortgaged and
humanity's debt growing.

We believe in God who sees all this ...
and keeps on crying.

But we also believe in God
who sees a mother giving birth – a life born from pain,
who sees two children playing - a seed growing,
who sees a flower blooming out of the debris - a new beginning,
who sees three crazy women clamouring for justice – an illusion that doesn't die
who sees the sun rising every morning - a time of opportunities.

We believe in God who sees all this ...
and laughs,
because,
in spite of it all,
there is hope.

*written by Gerardo Oberman, Argentina.
From Prayers for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2004,
posted on the World Council of Churches website.*

Prayers of Intercession

(invite the congregation to imagine the scene where a pebble is thrown into the middle of a pond.)

A pebble falls into the middle of a pond. It makes a splash or a plop, it breaks the surface, you can't help but notice.

This coming week lies before us, each of us sits at the centre of our own little world – the place where the pebble lands and makes most impact on our feelings and emotions, stirs our anxieties and our fears, inspires our hopes and our dreams...

Think for a moment of your immediate world – the things that you are worried about this coming week in your own life – the things that directly affect you. Never mind anyone else for now – God is interested in you – God wants to come close to you in your hopes, your dreams, your fears, your anxieties.... Say something to God about how you feel about this coming week, and listen for God's words of comfort and reassurance, hear

God's promise to walk alongside you and continue holding you in the palm of his hand...

The ripples begin to spread, creating circles, maybe the ducks are startled! The splash has disappeared – set your own life aside for a moment - your mind can now focus wider – the people and situations around you – your family, your friends, your work colleagues, your village, your club, your church.... God is interested in all of them – God is present in all of them – God wants to come close to their lives... say something to God about how you feel about this coming week and all those people and situations that surround you, and listen for God's words of comfort and reassurance... listen also for God's words of prompting challenge that we might find new ways of being fruitful disciples in the heart of those people and situations...

The ripples are getting harder to see – but you can see their impact on the shores of the pond – the water rises and falls. We know we are part of an unimaginably huge world – some of it we choose to get involved in – we have our passionate campaigns, some of it we choose to ignore – it seems too big, too complicated – too distant for us to effectively care for it all. God is intimately interested in all of it – God wants to come close to every living breathing tiniest part of it... say something to God about what you feel about the wider world that you are aware of through the news and through an ever more complex web of media that seems to bring it closer and closer to our doors... listen for God's words of comfort and reassurance, hear God's promise that she will redeem every part of creation... listen also for God's gentle, persistent, prompting challenge to stretch ourselves and find ways to join in God's care for the whole of creation.

Now the pond is still. Take a moment to drink in the peace of God that is beyond all human understanding... now mentally gird up your loins, put on your sandals, roll up your sleeves, pick up your stick – ready yourself to go out and face this week – for having talked it through with God, it is already changed. Amen.

Offertory Prayers

Our offering is collected in many and various ways these days, but our gifts are no less precious to God. Let us pray.

Loving God, you give to us beyond human measure;
You give to us without pausing to count the cost.
Accept these our gifts of money
And with them the gift of our lives
To be lived in your service
Today and every day. Amen

A Communion Liturgy

The Holy One be with you

And also with you

Open your hearts to the One who is Love

We open our hearts to you, O God

Let us give thanks to God, who gathers us together

To the One who welcomes us to the table, we give thanks and praise

God, your invitation to come and feast in your presence is but a taste of the love you extend to us every day. By your very nature, you are always seeking us out – searching for ways to connect us and connect with us. You meet us in the most ordinary of places and you make them sacred. By your grace, we come to recognize the holiness that dwells in the world around us, in our neighbours, in our own internal depths.

Therefore we join our voices with your people on earth and all the company of the heavens, singing praise to you,

Holy, Holy, Holy One

God of justice and love

Heaven and earth are full of your wonder

Hosanna, among us

Blessed are you and blessed is your eternal table. You welcome all who thirst for justice and hunger to grow in love. You ask us to extend this same welcome to all our neighbours, but God, since our beginning, we have struggled.

And so in your love for us, you took on flesh in Jesus. Through his life, you pointed to your presence on the margins. You revealed the sacredness in all life. You showed us how to live together, even among forces of destruction.

Believing it could transform the world, Jesus proclaimed the Good News. He called for the captives to be set free. He spoke of the lowly being lifted up. He talked of redistributing wealth and eradicating the causes of poverty. His commitment to practising love knew no bounds – not even the bounds of death.

On the night of his arrest, Jesus shared a meal with his companions. He took bread, blessed it, broke it, gave it to his disciples and said:

“This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

After the meal, he took the cup, blessed it, and shared it saying:

“This cup that is poured out is the new covenant.”

In remembrance of all you have done to save us, we proclaim the mystery of our faith:

Christ was birthed among us. Christ was killed among us. Christ rises again among us.

Pour out your Spirit on these gifts, O God. Make these ordinary elements into the Sacred gift of your presence with us once again. May they awaken us anew to your everlasting invitation into a life of resurrection. Aliven us in our pursuit of a world where all needs are met, power is balanced, and the worth of every creature and creation is celebrated.

In collective longing for a taste of your Kingdom on earth,
we join together in echoing the prayer of Jesus:

Our Creator, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name

Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespassed against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever.

Amen.

Prayer after receiving:

God, by the bread of heaven and the cup of life, you make us one body. Bind us together by your spirit that we might live into your hopes for us, a community centred in Christ and rich in compassion, commitment, courage, and care. May it be so. Amen.

*Communion Liturgy: from the free library of resources at "enfleshed",
<https://enfleshed.com/>*

Blessing

Send us out into your world, loving God,
To love and to serve.

And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Rest and remain with each one of you
This day, this week, and even for evermore. Amen

Hymn Suggestions

Hymn	RS	StF	CH4	MP
The love of God comes close	107	654		
Brother, sister, let me serve you	474	611	694	
When I needed a neighbour were you there		256	544	
Jesu Jesu fill us with your love	648	249		
Make me a channel of your peace	629	707	528	456
Take this moment, sign and space		513	501	
Christ be my leader by night as by day		492		
For all the saints who've shown your love		746		
Love is the touch of intangible joy			115	

Key:

RS = Rejoice and Sing, StF = Singing the Faith, CH4 = Church Hymnary 4, MP = Mission Praise

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