

Reflecting on our Jubilee
A Small Group Study Series

The URC celebrates its 50th birthday in October 2022. To mark this various writers have contributed to a series of readings, reflections, and prayers which will be distributed through the Daily Devotions email list every morning over the first two weeks of October. Some of these reflections have been used to provide these small group study sessions which will encourage us to reflect, give thanks, and rise to the challenge of being part of the URC in the 21st Century. Each session involves hymns from a variety of URC writers to help us reflect.

Session 1 Sing A New Church Into Being

Hymn *Let Us Talents And Tongues Employ*
The Rev'd Fred Kaan (1929-2009) Rejoice and Sing 453

Let us talents and tongues employ,
reaching out with a shout of joy:
bread is broken, the wine is poured,
Christ is spoken & seen & heard.

*Jesus lives again,
earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around: loaves abound!*

2: Christ is able to make us one,
at his table he set the tone,
teaching people to live to bless,
love in word and in deed express.

3: Jesus calls us in, sends us out
bearing fruit in a world of doubt,
gives us love to tell, bread to share:
God (Immanuel) everywhere!

Introduction

Question

- If you were asked to name a favourite hymn, what would it be and why?

Reading *Psalm 96: 1-6*

O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.
Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous works among all the peoples.
For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods.
For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.
Honour and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

Reflection

Question

- What do you like in a hymn? (is it the tune or the words or the pairing of the two?)

Prayer

Thank you God for the gift of song, for the wonder of hymns crafted in beauty and strength, set to music that lifts words, and that touches our spirits. Give us voices with which to sing, men and women with skill in composition, and the fellowship of the heavenly choir, to sing your eternal praise, Amen.

Hymn of Jubilee (for the United Reformed Church)

© Jan Berry Tune: *Charterhouse R&S 33 or Lord of the Years R&S 603*

We celebrate the call that's shaped our story,
the joys and struggles since we first begun;
we are your people, reaching for your glory
until the day when all shall be as one.

2: We welcome all to gather at Christ's table,
our wounds & sorrows made whole in your grace;
inviting all, regardless of the labels
defining us by status, creed, or race.

3: We long to see all people in your image,
sharing the world, the riches that you give;
but pride and greed can overwhelm the message
spoiling the life you meant us all to live.

4: As buildings fail, and worshippers grow older,
we wonder whether witness can survive.
We struggle on, with passion growing colder,
yet hope persists, still keeping faith alive.

5: Let Jubilee become a shout of mission,
as those who've been downtrodden find a voice.
We're reaching out with joy to catch the vision
that makes our hearts sing out with praise: "Rejoice!"

Hebrews 13: 7 - 8

Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings; for it is well for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by regulations about food, which have not benefited those who observe them.

Questions

- What are the ways in which your congregation welcomes different types of people?
- What else could your congregation do?

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for being there with us over the years,
when we struggle to be of one mind, a conciliar church.

Forgiving God, we are sorry for the times we have been our selfish,
for the times we put our interest before what we know to be true and correct.

Life sustaining God, continue give us the passion for humanity,
as we continue to act impartially, with kindness while we walk with you. Amen

Hymn

O God, Your Love's Undying Flame

The Rev'd Basil E. Bridge (b 1927) Tune: Sussex Carol, R&S 327

O God, your love's undying flame

was seen in desert bush ablaze,



we learned your secret name

past and future days;

we would learn what you require

and burn for you with living fire.

2: O Lord of fire, your love a flame

that longed to set the earth ablaze:

to bring the Kingdom's joy you came

and freed us, trapped in earth-bound ways;

Lord, we would share your love's desire,

and burn for you with living fire.

3: O Holy Spirit, tongues of flame that set the new-born Church ablaze;

to each believer then you came, and lives were filled with power and praise;

O Spirit, come, our lives inspire to burn for you with living fire.

Reading: *Isaiah 56: 1 - 8*

This is what the Lord says: "Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed. Blessed is the one who does this - the person who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it, and keeps their hands from doing any evil." Let no foreigner who is bound to the Lord say, "The Lord will surely exclude me from his people." And let no eunuch complain, "I am only a dry tree." For this is what the Lord says: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant - to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever. And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant - these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." The Sovereign Lord declares - he who gathers the exiles of Israel: "I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered."

Reflection

Questions

- Is the fact that we are provisional in our views – always being open to what God has in store for us next – a source of joy or frustration for you?
- The URC is a church which has, by design, decided it has a variety of views on a number of issues – back in the 1980s when the Churches of Christ joined, for example, we decided to honour and celebrate two different baptismal polices – either to baptise infants or to dedicate them and let them decide, as adults, if they wished to make a public faith commitment. In recent years we've decided we don't have a common position on same sex marriage, with those churches who wish to offer this being able to whilst no church has to. What do you think about this diversity?

Prayer

Holy God, You call us to be faithful and provisional;

to hold fast to what we know to be true, yet willing to follow where You call.

Help us to be true pilgrims, unafraid to follow,

faithful and fruitful, incisive and inclusive,

that we may be a house of prayer for all people. Amen.

Hymn Writers

The Rev'd Fred Kaan was a Congregationalist and, subsequently URC, minister serving in Plymouth, Geneva with the International Congregational Council, the Council for World Mission, and then as Moderator of the West Midlands Synod before his final ministry in an LEP in Swindon. He was a prolific hymn writer.

The Rev'd Dr Jan Berry is a retired URC minister who served, first in the Baptist Union, and then in the URC in and around Manchester before teaching at Northern College.

The Rev'd Basil Bridge was ordained to Congregational ministry in 1951 serving at Knowle in Warwickshire, Leicester (becoming part of the URC), Samford and Bourne in Lincolnshire, and Harrold in Bedfordshire. He wrote around 30 hymns and contributed tunes to 7 of them.

Contributors

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