

worship notes



Sunday 2nd June 2024
Proper 4 | Ordinary 9
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from the United Reformed Church

Call to Worship

We come to worship, we come to hear:

speak, Lord, your servants are listening.

Despite the siren voices around us, we are here:

speak, Lord, your servants are listening.

In the Babel noise of our world, we come to hear You, O God:

speak, Lord, your servants are listening.

Prayers of Approach, Confession, and Grace

We know, O God, that you search and know us,
that no one, not even ourselves, knows us as well as you do;
you discern our thoughts even when we are far away from you,
you journey with us in our coming and going, our resting and our sleeping.
You knit us together in the womb,
and we praise you for your fearful and wonderful creation;
a creation that includes even us!

Yet we know, O God, that we try to flee from your Spirit,
to block our ears when you speak.
We prefer the noise of our world to the calm of your Breath.
We try to take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest reaches of the sea.
We try to flee from you by making our bed in Hell,
and yet you are there, waiting for us to turn back to you.

Forgive us, O Holy One, when we turn from you,
remind us of your loving kindness, and assure us, always, of the power of your love,
found in weakness, defying even death, restoring us to wholeness. Amen.

Introduction

We focus in this service on hearing God; the young Samuel didn't understand the calls he was hearing in the night, the elderly, but ineffective, Eli did. The Psalmist reminds us that

we can never be out of God's loving presence – even in the depths of darkness God's light finds us and, in our Gospel, reading, Jesus' call to be something of a controversialist becomes clear when he chides, and outsmarts, his critics who accuse him of letting his disciples break the Law. So, we pray as we prepare to hear God speak to us through word, music, silence and bread and wine.

Prayer for Illumination

Speak to us, O God, as we try to listen;
through the daily routine and ritual of our lives – speak to us,
through the humdrum and everyday – make yourself known,
as we hear your word read and proclaimed,
stir within us that we may hear, love, follow. Amen.

Readings

1 Samuel 3:1-20 | Psalm 139 | St Mark 2:23-3:6

All Age Activity

Play a variety of sounds and ask people to guess what they are – have a mix of easy and difficult sounds – find a recording of a rabbi blowing a shofar for example to tax brains a bit! If you have an AV system you could play the sound then after they've guess have a picture of whatever it was that made the sound. The point is we have to listen to understand what the sound is just as Samuel had to listen to understand God in our OT story.

Sermon Notes

1 Samuel 3:1-20 Kindly but elderly Eli, slow on the uptake, but befuddled by sleep encourages innocent Samuel who hears but does not understand his call to announce God's abandonment of the priestly ministry of Eli's House. Knowing the rest of the story we know that this is the start of Samuel's own call and how he, as God's spokesperson, made and broke monarchies. The story attracts attention at different places in the Church's history – will God abandon those who, in theory, speak His word? Will the good be reward and the evil punished always? God's refusal to give up on God's own people is reassuring but can disturb those of us who feel called to help lead those people? What if we're cast aside like kindly Eli's house was? God's call here is to Samuel, a boy who doesn't understand much and this call is sharp, persistent and hard – he has to tell Eli that God's favour has moved on as he colluded with his sons' evildoing. Samuel doesn't seem to be making a career move; there's no indication he knew what God had in mind for him. We see deep truths about God's work here – God doesn't start with the rich and wise but the young and foolish. God is persistent; He keeps waking up Samuel until Samuel, with guidance from the imperfect Eli, finally gets it. Samuel's response "here I am" is one of open handed acceptance to God's sovereign will – a will that could be thwarted if Samuel

had said “no”. Yet as lovely as the passage is it can raise some questions; generally Assessment Boards of all denominations get a bit twitch if candidates describe their sense of call as an audible voice! Christian history is littered with the tragedies that come from individuals declaring their calling outwith the usual discernment processes. The reverse is also true; many who are called to ministry shy away from it believing that as they’ve not heard a voice, seen a vision or had other dramatic calls they clearly aren’t what God wants engaged in His service. Nowadays, denominations try to blend a range of Biblical models of call with a careful discernment process yet still believe that God calls unlikely people into often unlikely forms of service.

Psalm 139 (*the Lectionary misses out vv 7-12 but I suggest you include them and used Bernadette Farrell’s sung version of this Psalm O God You Search Me and You Know Me*) The ancient poet understood deep things about God – what we’d now call God’s omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence (the all-knowing, always present, all-powerful God). These divine attributes, however, are seen in everyday things – sitting down, rising up, walking, stopping and speaking. In the everyday things of life God’s power and purpose is seen; Samuel heard God in a dream (or maybe was awoken from his dreams by God’s voice). Dreaming and disturbed nights are everyday occurrences but through them, the ancient authors suggest, we can perceive God. Further, it’s in the everyday things of life that God knows us. The poet then muses on God’s presence; there is nowhere we can go where God is not – even the depths of hell. As Bernadette Farrell renders this part of the poem “There is nowhere on earth I can escape you: Even the darkness is radiant in your sight.” The Psalmist sees God’s all-powerful nature – making light from dark, our own “fearful and wonderful made creation” at God’s own hands. What might God’s omnipotence mean – the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism felt that God can be trusted to turn evil to our good; a hard thing to believe in the face of the evils of the world. It’s clearly not an omnipotence that protects people from evil as Jesus himself wasn’t protected and was sent to an agonising death on the cross. Instead, we realise that evil isn’t the last word but that death, evil, sin and even the systems that control us will one day have to give way to God’s sovereign will. Omnipotence is seen in weakness, loss, and vulnerability which, like many things in our faith seems a contradiction in terms!

St Mark 2:23-3:6 Jewish faith and practice, like Islamic faith and practice, is grounded in the everyday things of life in tangible ways that, in many ways, Christianity no longer reflects. Laws govern what food can be eaten and how, washing before prayers, prescribed times of prayer etc. The whole of life is infused with reminders of God’s presence; Christian practices around this like giving up meat for Lent or eating fish on Fridays have fallen out of favour in the West (but not in Orthodox forms of Christianity). These practices, as well as giving a sense of one’s faith also reinforce a sense of identity; Cardinal Nichols has tried to encourage Catholics to take up fish on Fridays and crossing oneself in practice as both expressions of faith and a witness badge of identity. The problems can come when the badges of faith and identity are fixated upon and get in the way of the faith behind the identity. The religious leaders in today’s passage critique Jesus’ disciples for seeming to break the law – idly plucking grain. Technically this was

work but really was probably just an absent-minded thing. Jesus quoted an Old Testament story when David, in need, took the bread reserved as a gift for God and used it to feed himself and his men – probably a greater affront to religious sensibilities. His healing on the sabbath might also be seen as work in strict interpretations of the Law and Jesus outsmarts them there too. Christians can be tempted to read pharisees as being the “baddies” in the story yet Jesus seems to engage with them, argue with them on their own terms, and understands their motivations. Jesus’ calling, like Samuel’s was dangerous and had some hard truths that needed to be told.

Weaving the threads As Christians we believe that all are called by God to various forms of ministry; as Reformed Christians we value the calling of those in ordered ministry but also see a variety of roles in local churches to which we might be called – youth and children’s work, Eldership, lay preaching and worship leading, welcoming, sharing faith with others. In our tradition we are rightly suspicious of those who assert a call but don’t submit themselves for wider discernment in the Church to test that Call. We know God is at work in our lives – in the ordinary everyday things – and it is in those things – sitting, eating, sleeping, that we both perceive God and understand God’s call on our lives. Our calls are not only perceived in the ordinary things of life but worked out there too; they may not be as grandiose as Samuel proclaiming the end of God’s favour on priests and kings or anointing new monarchs, they may not be as confrontational as Jesus’ ongoing arguments with the Pharisees. It isn’t through might, glory, or power that we find God but on the edge, in the broken places of our lives and our world. Our calling, like Samuel’s, like Jesus’, might be disturbing and unsettling but as the Psalmist reminds us we cannot flee from God’s Spirit.

Affirmation of Faith

We believe that we belong, body and soul, to the One who gives us breath,
who is our comfort in life and death,
and has redeemed us from the powers and principalities of this world,
and frees us from the evil that seeks to drag us down.

We believe that we belong, body and soul, to the One who gives us breath
and so we no longer live for ourselves but for Christ,
taking comfort that we belong to Him,
yearning for the resurrection that is to come, when we will be made whole.

We believe that we belong, body and soul, to the One who gives us breath
who calls us to follow in the everyday things of life,
to perceive what eyes don’t fully see,
to listen to what our ears don’t normally hear,
to dream what the human heart struggles to imagine - the world that is to come,
when all will be free and creation will be made whole. **Amen.**

(with a resonance from the Heidelberg Confession of Faith)

Intercessions

We bring our prayers for the world, the Church and those we love to Most High, who hears us even as we long to hear God.

Eternal One,
we bring to you places of pain in our world,
where your voice is drowned out by hate;
where guns and missiles, tanks and soldiers, drones and bombs
banish the cool whisper of your calm.
Speak your peace, O God, in Gaza and the West Bank, in Israel, in Ukraine and Russia.
We hear the hatred too, Most High, away from the battle field;
in our political life here and around the world
rhetoric is weaponised, diversity denied,
and narrow identities trump the richness of our culture.
Speak your peace, O God, to our political leaders and candidates,
that public service will again be honourable.

pause

Risen Lord Jesus,
we bring you the Church
terrible as a mighty army with banners,
yet suffering with neglect, bemused by cultural change,
and living with self-imposed wounds.
We pray for those who have been hurt by the Church,
those abused by clergy and Christian institutions,
and those denied a place at the table for how they love.
We pray for those who lead the Church,
charged with hearing and responding to your voice
in a time and culture they don't fully understand,
that through the noise they hear your voice, and follow where you call.

pause

Most Holy Spirit,
we pray for our culture, giving thanks for the rich diversity of our world,
and for your work in stirring consciences to action.
Help us listen for where you are at work – and then join in!
We pray to, O Comforter, for those we know and love who are in any kind of need...

longer pause

We join all our prayers together, O Most High, as we pray as Jesus taught saying, Our Father...

Offertory

Our response to God's loving call always requires giving – of ourselves, of our talents, of our time and, of course, of our treasure. The charities we support, the gifts we make the Church are signs of our everyday spirituality as important as food laws, ritual washing or times of prayer are in other faith traditions. Through giving we sanctify even our finances. As our collection is brought up during the next hymn we remember, with thanksgiving the call that God gives to each of us to make life, bread, and beauty available to all.

God of all that is good, we thank you for these gifts and all that you give us.
Bless these gifts that we may use them wisely,
help us always to hear your call to us
that we may be the change our world needs. Amen.

Communion Prayer

May God be with you:	and also with you.
Lift up your hearts.	We lift them to God.
Let us give thanks to our gracious God:	it is right to give thanks & praise.

It is truly right to give you thanks, it is fitting that we offer you praise, Source of all mercy, faithful One.

You sent Jesus Christ your Son among us as redeemer and Lord.
He was moved with compassion for the poor and the powerless,
for the sick and the sinner;
he made himself neighbour to the oppressed.
By his words and actions he proclaimed to the world that you care for us
as a mother cares for her children.
He taught us to listen for you in the simple things of life,
and to respond to your call to follow.
And so, with all the angels and saints we sing the joyful hymn of your praise:

Sanctus (Tune: Scarborough Fair)

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**Holy, holy, holy the Lord, God of endless power and might;
the earth, the heav'ns are full of your love.**

Sing hosanna! Glory to God!

Blest is he, the one who is sent in the name of God the Most High.

O holy, holy, holy our Lord! Sing hosanna! Glory to God!

You are truly blessed, O God of holiness,
you accompany us with love as we journey through life.
Blessed too is your Son, Jesus,

who is present among us and whose love gathers us together.
As once he did for his disciples,
Jesus now opens the scriptures for us and breaks the bread.
Blessed are you, holy and faithful God.

Great and merciful One,
we ask you to send down your Holy Spirit,
to hallow these gifts of bread and wine,
that they may become for us the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ.
Blessed are you, holy and faithful God.

On the eve of his passion and death, while at table with those he loved,
Jesus took bread and gave you thanks, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples and said:

"Take this all of you and eat it, this is my body, which will be given up for you."

When supper was ended he took the cup, again he gave you thanks,
and handing the cup to his disciples he said:

"Take this all of you and drink from it, this is the cup of my blood,
the blood of the new and everlasting covenant,
it will be shed for you and for all, so that sins may be forgiven.
Do this in memory of me."

Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:

Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again!

And so Majestic One, we celebrate the memory of Jesus your son,
whom you led through suffering and death on the Cross
to the glory of the resurrection and a place at your right hand.
Until Jesus, our saviour, comes again, we proclaim the work of your love,
and we offer you the bread of life and the cup of eternal blessing.

Look with favour on us now, as we, in obedience to the Lord's command
show forth his sacrifice on the Cross by the bread broken
and the wine poured for us to eat and drink.
Let us recognise that Jesus, himself, risen and ascended, is present with us now,
and gives himself for our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.

Lord, perfect your Church in faith and love,
Open our eyes to the needs of all,
inspire us with words and deeds,
to comfort those who labour and are burdened.
Keep our service of others faithful to the example and command of Jesus.

Let your Church be a living witness to truth and freedom,
to justice and peace, that all may be lifted up by the hope of a world made new.
When our pilgrimage on Earth is complete welcome us into your heavenly home,
where we shall dwell with you forever, there with all the saints and martyrs of God,
We shall praise you and give you glory, through Jesus your Son.

Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honour is yours, Eternal Majesty, forever and ever. Amen.

*Adapted from the Catholic Eucharistic Prayer for Various Occasions 1995
and the Basis of Union n15*

To prepare ourselves to receive the Lord in Holy Communion, let us sing again affirming our faith.

Acclamation (Tune St Columba)

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When we eat this bread, and drink this cup,
we proclaim your death Lord Jesus.
Until you come in glory, until you come in glory. (repeat)

Post Communion Prayer

Bless the Lord, O my soul; **and all that is within me, bless God's holy name!**
Bless the Lord, O my soul, **and forget not all God's benefits.**

Loving God, we thank you that you have fed us in this sacrament,
united us with Christ, and given us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet
in your eternal realm.

Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory,
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Blessing

May the One who calls us in the night and the day,
the One who encourages us to do edgy things,
and the One who inspires us through the everyday things of life,
call, encourage and inspire you, that you may follow.
And the blessing of Almighty God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
be with you and all now and always, Amen.

Hymn Suggestions

	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Sing for God's Glory		172	116	
O God, you search me and you know me. Ps 139		97	728	1343
Sent by the Lord		250	672	
Called by Christ to be disciples			660	
God It Was Who Said to Abraham			464	
Take and Eat, Take and Eat		670		
God of Justice			699	1174
I The Lord of Sea and Sky		251	663	
I Heard The Voice of Jesus Say	349	540	248	275
There's A Wideness in God's Mercy	353	187	416	683
Come Living God When Least Expected	354	609		
Just As I am without one plea	364	553	556	396
O Watcher in the Wilderness			667	

Other Hymns

Damian Lundy's *O The Word of My Lord Deep Within My Being/Song of A Young Prophet* and is easily found online. The score will be in *Celebration Hymnal* and it works very well with today's OT reading.

Fred Pratt Green's *How Clear is Our Vocation Lord* goes to Repton and can be found [here](#).

Other Ideas...

Why not have an extract from Queen's *Radio Gaga* as the opening music? It's a nostalgic look back at radio compared to the writer's then experience of meaningless noise surrounding him on the airwaves. You might want to end the service with the reflecting song *If It Be Your Will* by Leonard Cohen where the poet/mystic muses on hearing and obeying God.