

# worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> October  
St Francis of Assisi  
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## Note

To mark the final Sunday of the Season of Creation we think about St Francis of Assisi whose feast day fell on Friday through Jesus' question "do you want to be made well?" In recent months we've seen riots with incredible displays of racism and wars around the world which makes us ask Jesus' question "do you want to be made well?" We continue to see the environmental disaster unfold with record temperatures seen again this year and changing climate patterns wreaking havoc; again we wonder if Jesus' question "do you want to be made well?" could be asked also of the earth and what her answer might well be. So, we come to worship, seeking to be made well and to understand God's purposes better.

## Call to Worship

In the face of a world we struggle to understand, we come to God  
**wanting to be made well.**

In a world where hate wins votes, and where asylum seekers are demonised and burnt out of their hotels, we come to God

**wanting to be made well.**

In a world hell bent on destruction and degradation, where the earth groans with longing to be made well, we come to God,

**wanting to make things well.**

## Prayers of Approach, Confession, & Grace

We come, O Majestic One,  
from east and west, north and south,  
to sing Your praises, rejoice in Your presence,  
and hear again Your Word.

We come, O Risen One,  
to be made well and to tend those things we have wounded,  
cherishing all you love and redeem,  
finding light, love, and liberation in You.

We come, O Spirit,  
to see You in creation's mirror,  
finding both Your love and admonition.  
Forgive us when we have not cherished creation,  
not valued Your people, cheapened Your grace, and turned away.

Give us time, O Trinity of Love,  
to change, to turn back, and to be made well. Amen.

As the planet spins, the seasons turn,  
and refreshing breeze becomes autumn storm,  
we accept Your grace, O God, turn back to You,  
and pledge to follow. Amen.

## Introduction

Francis of Assisi was a 13<sup>th</sup> Century mystic, poet and friar who founded the Order named after him. Rejecting the wealth of his parents, Francis preached to, and lived amongst, the poor in an age where the Church feared they would be attracted to alternative religious movements. His call to rebuild the Church was first understood to repair the derelict church of San Damiano and other ruins around Assisi but was later broadened to an understanding he had to help the Church renew itself when it felt it was losing ground to groups it considered heretical.

He is associated with the environmental movement by the contemporary Church due to his poetry where different aspects of creation are greeted as siblings – Brother Sun, Sister Moon etc. He believed that nature was the mirror of God - famously even preaching to the birds. Francis believed the world was created good and beautiful by God but needed redemption due to human sin. In one story of his life, he tamed a wolf that had been preying on both livestock and humans helping it make peace with the local villagers who undertook to feed it so it wouldn't prey on them in future. John Paul II made him the patron saint of ecology. Remembered now for the introduction of nativity scenes, love of nature, and oneness with creation Francis' feast ends the Season of Creation which many churches observe in September and early October. Let's listen for Jesus as we hear ancient and contemporary words.

## Prayer for Illumination

Your glory, O God, is our light,  
a light that guides and guards us.  
Reveal to us now, O God, your glory  
read and proclaimed in ancient and contemporary word,  
as a light to us in the gloom. Amen.

## All Age Activity

Excuses. We all make excuses when we've not done something we should have done. Can you think of excuses you've used?

Examples might be about not getting homework done, not doing jobs around the house, not getting enough exercise, not doing as someone else asked.

How do you feel when people use excuses when they've let you down?

How do you feel when you have to use an excuse as you've let someone else down?

In our Gospel reading today we hear of Jesus who seemed bewildered by the excuses a disabled person came up with for not getting into a healing pool in time. Jesus asked 'do you want to be made well?' it's a question we might ask ourselves too.

## Readings

*Revelation 21: 10, 22-22:5 | St John 5: 1 – 9*

## Sermon Notes

*St John*

Biblical scholars debate the inclusion of v4; most modern Bibles omit it. The verse is thought to be a later addition to try and make sense of why the waters were stirred up. I like to leave it in as most Christians throughout time have known this verse, you may wish to omit it. At face value this is a simple healing story, the poor guy can't quite get into the waters in time and so remains disabled. Except, Jesus' question is rather odd. Of course the man wishes to get well, why else would he be there? Maybe, however, the excuses were betraying something deeper. Maybe he liked his life as it was, maybe the changes that healing would bring would be too disruptive. Maybe he didn't want to be made well.

Much has been, and will be, written about the summer riots in England and Northern Ireland. We'll hear about concerns about immigration, lack of investment, criminal thuggery but not so much about the racism fuelled by alcohol and social media bad actors which led to people trying to burn their neighbours out of their sanctuaries. It's hard for us to confront the racism in our society as we like to pretend it's not there. We don't use uncouth language, we recognise that our sisters and brothers from other cultures are also made in God's image, we have had people who have been minoritised due to their ethnicity achieve the nations' highest offices and yet...scratch below the surface, add alcohol and perceived injustice and many amongst us riot – first time offenders, children, a man in his 70s. Stiff prison sentences and fast justice calmed things down but does our society wish to be made well? Will it face the truth about itself in order to be made well?

10 countries around the world reported temperatures above 50 degrees this year. The higher temperatures change weather patterns, the ice melts, the seas rise, and the heat kills. We endanger the creatures who share this planet with us. We know this yet we struggle to change. We are encouraged to reduce, reuse, and recycle, yet every missile fired in a war does far more damage to the environment than any of us could do in everyday life. We know we must change but, like the guy at the pool, we have our excuses ready as Jesus asks us “do you want to be made well?”

Elections in America, Europe, India and here have all shown that the rhetoric is more polarised than normal, that the cultural issues of gender and identity take on a force and importance we’ve not seen before as change, fear, and uncertainty are all weaponised and lies are described as “alternative facts”. No wonder Jesus sounds incredulous when he asks us “do you want to be made well?”

### *St Francis*

St Francis, a young lad from a wealthy family who rejected wealth and lived with the poor seeking to keep them in the Church through a simple proclamation of the Gospel. He managed, where other movements had failed, to remain trusted by the Church and he is remembered fondly now. He’s a saint that speaks to our age; unswayed by wealth, seeking after peace, even preaching to an enemy commander, Francis enchants us. Pope John Paul II made him the patron saint of ecology and his feast ends the Season of Creation when many churches seek to renew their commitment to live in harmony with the earth. In his poems and life Francis saw creation not just as something we had to care for but a mirror wherein we glimpse God. Animals, the sun, moon, wind, stars, rain are all seen as siblings. He preached to birds and a wolf, asking people to simply trust in God and God’s providence. His radical acceptance of Jesus’ call on his life changed his world and his example might change our own lives and help us to be made well.

- How different might our world be if we saw God both at work and present in the created order around us? Would we seek to tame and subdue God’s dwelling?
- Would we seek to exploit the earth with no thought of tomorrow if we remembered that it’s through the earth we experience God?

### *Revelation*

We are offered a vision of what a new world might look like. The writer sees the coming Kingdom of God as like a new city, a new Jerusalem; a city with gates open wide with no fear of invasion, a tree gives abundant life and healing for the nations, there’s no more night, no need for the light of lamp or sun as God’s own self will illuminate us. In the passage there’s no sense of how we get to this new city of God; yet the writer of Revelation writes of persecution and tribulation; he doesn’t offer excuses but knows there will be suffering. Healing comes but at a terrible cost; the cost borne by Jesus on the Cross and the cost we all must pay to be faithful disciples.

## *Weaving the Threads*

The man at the pool knew change wasn't easy. Maybe he liked his life more than he hated it. Was he prepared for those changes that healing would bring? It's all very well assuming that wellness is what he wanted but he might not have been able to face what that meant. Like Jesus, we wonder if he wanted to be made well.

Those who lead our society know that it's not as easy as anyone with a political opinion thinks it is. Difficult choices always need to be made, an aging population with a declining birthrate and a stoked distrust of immigration means there's a no-win situation for any government unless different stories are told. Does our society want to be made well, we wonder? If it does it needs to read different news and listen to different people.

We all know that we need to live differently due to climate change. The growth of electric vehicles and infrastructure is great, but we still can't recycle something as ubiquitous as yoghurt pots! Do the powers that be want to make things well I wonder?

It is said one campaigns in poetry but governs in prose; this time Labour campaigned in prose – rather dull prose really telling us things won't get better quickly. Yet, despite this commendable honesty, there's still distrust and a sense that it's all a blame game. Maybe we're not yet at a place where we really want our politics to be made well. Maybe, like the guy in the Gospel story, we prefer to sit at the side and long for things to improve but refuse to get up and walk.

Revelation offers a vision of the coming kingdom; a kingdom Jesus proclaimed, and St Francis tried to embody with his radical lifestyle. Jesus' incredulity with the excuses rings down to us now; do we want to be made well? If so, how are we prepared to embody that wellness in our life together as a church, in our commitment to ecology, in our resistance to racism, and in our demands for an honest politics? What price might we be willing to pay for that wellness? Are we willing to change? There are no easy answers, plenty of excuses are ready to trip off the tongue but, above it all, Jesus' question rings out "do you want to be made well?" Do we?

## **Affirmation of Faith**

**We believe in God.**

**Despite His silence and His secrets**

**we believe that He lives.**

**Despite evil and suffering**

**we believe that He made the world so that all would be happy in life.**

**Despite the limitations of our reason**

**and the revolts of our hearts,**

**we believe in God.**

**We believe in Jesus Christ.**

**Despite the centuries which separate us  
from the time when he came to earth,  
we believe in His word.**

**Despite our incomprehension and our doubt,  
we believe in His resurrection.**

**Despite his weakness and poverty,  
we believe in His reign.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit.**

**Despite appearances  
we believe He guides the Church;  
despite death we believe in eternal life;  
despite ignorance and disbelief,  
we believe that the Kingdom of God is promised to all. Amen.**

*Translated by Andy Braunston from the  
Reformed Church of France's Hymn Book Alléluia.*

## **Intercessions**

Eternal God

we come as poor and needy sinners,  
weak and wounded, sick and sore,  
knowing you have the power to heal and save, revive and renew.  
Hear us as we bring our prayers for the Church, the world, and ourselves,  
that we will be well.

*pause*

We pray, Lord Jesus, for your Church,  
for places of persecution and places of indifference,  
for where Your Church is growing, and for where it's in decline.  
Hold us in Your love, Living Lord,  
that we may see where we need to be refreshed,  
where we need to let go,  
and where we need to invest,  
that as You lead we might follow,  
that as You offer healing and wholeness to a hurting world  
we may help and not hinder.

*pause*

We pray, Suffering Creator,  
for our world, giving thanks for its beauty and diversity,  
and holding in prayer places of pain and poison.  
We pray for all who are weary and heavy laden,  
lost and ruined by our fallen imperfections;  
we pray for the earth, our wounded mother,  
and with all the life with which we share this planet,

our siblings, a mirror wherein we see your glory,  
that we may learn to live wisely, to tread gently,  
to heal and not wound Creation.

*pause*

We pray, Most Holy Spirit,  
for ourselves and those we love;  
we lift to You those we know who are ill in mind, body and spirit...

*longer pause*

that you bring rest and relief, strength and joy.

We pray too our ourselves,  
so often full of excuses why we won't be made well.  
Remind us that if we tarry until we're better  
we'll never come to You at all.

Help us arise, O God and come to You,  
Embrace us with your loving arms,  
That we may know your power and your love.

*pause*

And so, with confidence we pray as Jesus taught, Our Father...

## Offertory

Our culture doesn't really know what to do about giving. Extravagance is urged upon us at Christmas, yet charities which seek to raise money to change the world can be seen with suspicion. We're taught that we should give something back but not so much that it troubles us! Yet as disciples of Jesus we know we are called to give – of our time in our everyday discipleship, of our love to those we know and those we don't, of our talents as we seek to build in small imperceptible steps the coming Kingdom of God and, of course, with our material wealth. Jesus told us we can't serve both God and money yet so much of life is given over to monetary concerns. Here, at this point in our worship, we give thanks for all that is given – time, talents, and treasure – knowing that God takes what we give and uses it to grow the Kingdom. Let's pray

God of sun and moon, earth and water, wind and fire,  
God of changing season and glorious creation,  
God of our own lives and loves, bless these gifts which we offer to You,  
that they may be used wisely to proclaim your coming Kingdom. Amen.

## Holy Communion

The Spirit of God be with you; **and also with you!**  
Lift your hearts to heaven; **where Christ in glory reigns!**  
Let us give thanks to God. **It is right to offer thanks and praise!**

*From the New Zealand Prayer Book © 1989 Collins.*

All praise, honour, and blessing are yours, O Most High.  
We see Your glory through your creatures:  
the Sun, our brother, lights the day and warms the earth,  
the moon, our sister, shines with the stars showing precious beauty.  
Through Brother Wind You give energy to all creation.  
Through Sister Water you give life and sustenance.  
Through Brother Fire You warm the night and banish the cold,  
and through our sister, Mother Earth, You feed and rule us.  
And so, with all that draws breath, we sing to Your praise and glory  
with all the life with which we share this planet:

### **The Scarborough Fair Sanctus**

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<b>Holy, holy, holy the Lord, God of endless power &amp; might; the earth, the heav'ns are full of your love. Sing hosanna! Glory to God!</b>	<b>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!</b>
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Indeed, you are holy, O Most High;  
You allow us to glimpse You in creation,  
seeing there, as in a mirror, Your eternal power and divine nature.

Yet we turned away from what was before our eyes  
and so, through precious Law and brave prophet,  
You called us again and again to follow You,  
to care for the poor, the weak, and the excluded,  
but we ignored Your words, Your messengers, and Your people.

In the fullness of time, in Jesus, You became one of us, one with us.  
Through his life and teaching He called us back to You;  
He taught us to love those who hate us, to give without counting the cost,  
to proclaim Your mighty deeds, and to see You in those we consider the least.  
The powers of His age hated and conspired against Him,  
dragging him to death, even a shameful death on the Cross,  
and so He was welcomed by Sister Death, whom none can escape.



But You did not leave Him with the dead, raising Him to new life!  
You defeated the evil powers that conspired against Him,  
through the loving weakness of the Cross.  
You overturned the established order of things,  
to show the true values of Your Kingdom,  
where the hungry are filled and the rich sent empty away.

Before He was given over to Sister Death,  
He shared in the simplicity of a meal with His friends,  
And during that meal he took a loaf of bread,  
and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying,

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

And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying,

“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”

Let us proclaim the mystery of our faith:

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

Come Holy Spirit on us gathered here around this table,  
and lift us in heart and mind to heaven,  
where with the saints and martyrs of old, we may feast with You.

Pour out Your love and power on these gifts of bread and wine,  
that as we eat and drink in Your presence, You fill us with grace.  
May these simple things be for us the bread of life and the cup of salvation.  
As we eat and drink, fill us with love, call us again to Your service,  
that, strengthened at this table, we may proclaim your praise and embody your love.

Blessed be You, O God, the holy and undivided Trinity,  
who was, and is, and is to come, now and evermore, Amen.

Bread and wine, the gifts of God for the people of God.

**May we who share these gifts be found in Christ, and Christ in us.**

## Prayer after Communion

Blessed are You, God of growth and discovery;  
Yours is the inspiration that has altered and changed our lives;  
Yours is the power that has brought us to new dangers and opportunities.  
Set us, Your new creation, to walk through this new world,  
watching and learning, loving and trusting, until Your Kingdom comes. Amen.

*From the New Zealand Prayer Book © 1989 Collins.*

## Blessing

May the One whose glory is reflected in Creation,  
the One who calls us to be made well,  
the One who gives us the power to change,  
enable you to see, in creation's mirror, the majesty of God,  
assist you to be made well,  
and empower you to be the change the world needs,  
and the blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
be with you now and always, Amen.

Hymn Suggestions				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Let All the World In Every Corner Sing	114	122	57	404
God we praise you, God we bless you		120		1277
From all that dwell below the skies	723	146	75	
All Creatures of our God and King	39	147	99	7
All You Works of God		151		
Make Me A Channel of Your Peace <i>or</i>	629	528	707	456
Lord Make Us Servants of your peace		527		
My Life Flows on in Endless Song		565		1210

RS – *Rejoice & Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | StF – *Singing the Faith* | MP – *Mission Praise*

You might find it worth learning the old hymn [Come, You Sinners, Poor and Needy](#) by the English Calvinist minister Joseph Hart which is set to a haunting early American tune called [Restoration](#). This chorus is often added “I will arise and go to Jesus, He will embrace me in His arms; in the arms of my dear Saviour, O there are ten thousand charms.” It’s making something of a comeback in the American evangelical scene.