

worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 13th
October 2024
Proper 23 | Ordinary 28
The Revd
Lindsey Sanderson

Call to Worship

The Psalmist asks God, 'teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart'. As we gather for worship we ask for God's help to count our days

- days of gladness when we have offered our praise to God
- days of sorrow when we have taken comfort from God's compassion for us
- days of uncertainty when we have placed our trust in God's guiding hand
- days of hope when we have looked to our God who makes all things new

For each of these days we bring our thanks, knowing and trusting that God has been with us. As we worship we celebrate that God is with us each and every day. God is with us now.

drawing on Psalm 90.12

Prayers of Approach, Confession & Assurance of Pardon

Gracious God, new every morning is your love for us. In our waking and rising we are gifted a new day to experience and share that love with those we meet. Help us to look at each day with fresh eyes which are eager to see the intricacy of your creation, eager to discern the image of the divine in person we meet, eager to acknowledge the action of the Spirit in simple acts of kindness shared between people.

Your love is all embracing, Creating and compassionate God. It is gentle yet strong, it is comforting and brings us reassurance but sometimes your love is difficult too, for you speak words of challenge, uncovering those things we do not want to hear. You call us to account when we fail to love you and our neighbour, you call us to account when in our carelessness we use words which harm or belittle, you call us to account when we place ourselves at the centre of our world and forget our connectedness with others.

We recognise our failings and our need to be forgiven by you and those whom we have failed. In your reconciling love you welcome us within your household and give us the opportunity to continue upon the journey of faith, each day trusting in your love and presence with us and for this we bring our thanks.

As we worship, hear us as we pray... Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever. Amen.

Prayer of Illumination

Come Holy Spirit we pray,
open our ears to hear,
our minds to understand,
and our hearts to love.
May our living reflect your dwelling within us,
enabling us to be people of love, joy, hope and peace. Amen.

Readings

Amos 5.6-7,10-15 Mark 10.17-31

All Ages Activities

- Threading a rope through the eye of a needle (see the sermon notes for an explanation of why Jesus may have been talking about ropes and not camels.) Have some twine available that is too big to be threaded through the eye of a needle, but which can be unravelled and individual strands can be threaded. Talk about unravelling our lives to find the individual values that make up who we are. What are these values? How do we live them out? How do they link with God's values as Jesus articulates them in the passage and the values Amos shares with us in the passage from Amos 5.
- Invite people to share what values are most important to them. This could be prepared in advance with a number of people being invited to talk about their values
- As a congregation you could try and find out to see which are your most important values. Values could be written on cards in advance or suggested on the day and people could be invited to indicate which they feel are the most important to them or for the life of the congregation
- This Sunday falls either during Challenge Poverty Week (in Scotland) or just before Challenge Poverty Week (in England and Wales). You could find out about a project that seeks to reduce poverty in your community, have a collection of money or goods for a local anti-poverty organisation for example a foodbank, write a letter to your new MP to share your ideas about poverty or invite them to a discussion about poverty in your community. Visit [Challenge Poverty Week - The Poverty Alliance](https://challengepoverty.co.uk/) for information about Scotland and <https://challengepoverty.co.uk/> for England and Wales.

Sermon Notes

- It is easy to read our Gospel reading from Mark and focus upon it as an attack against people with money but Jesus and his disciples were far from poor. Jesus himself came from what today we might call a middle-class family, running its own building business. The disciples, the inner core of fishermen had enough employees to sustain their fishing business even while they were spending time out with Jesus. So the instruction to this particular individual must have been specific to his personal circumstance rather than a blanket statement about money as such.
- ‘the kingdom of God’ is described by Ian Fraser, founder of the Iona Community as ‘God’s way of doing things’ so the question for the young man is ‘How hard it will be for rich people to enter into God’s way of doing things?’
- The young man seems to be genuinely looking for answers. At the end of the encounter it seems as if the young man places more value in his material wealth than in following Jesus and so it was hard for him to enter into God’s way of doing things.
- The conversation continues with the discussion about the camel and the eye of the needle. One popular explanation is that ‘the eye of a needle’ referred to a small gate in the city walls through which a camel could only pass by getting onto its knees and having its load removed. Unfortunately, there is no evidence of the existence of such a gate – and a more likely explanation is to be found again in the oral nature of the stories that Mark tells. The Aramaic word for ‘rope’ when translated into Greek becomes kamilos, can sound remarkably similar to the Greek word for ‘camel’, kamelos. Did Jesus say that a thick rope could only pass through the eye of a needle with great difficulty? It would need to be unravelled first into its component strands before it could get through a small opening like the eye of a needle. This continues into a conversation about salvation and the order of things in the kingdom.
- The call to discipleship is an invitation to unravel the way we see things, even family and home and livelihood, and that will often involve reassessing the value we give to things, or situations or people or relationships as we begin to see the world and its people through God’s eyes, through God’s way of doing things, thinking about what we value and why it is important to us.
- Amos is saying something similar to the people of his day. ‘Seek me and live.....Seek good and not evil that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. Hate evil, love good, maintain justice in the courts.’ Here is a clear indication of God’s way of doing things, a clear instruction to the people of Amos day and our own of how to ensure that God is with us. As we reflect upon what it is we value do we see that we are actively hating evil, loving what is good and maintaining justice. What does that look like in your life, in your faith community and in our world?
- This is the Sunday which falls in Challenge Poverty Week in Scotland and is the day before Challenge Poverty Week starts in England and Wales. How are you or could you mark this? Perhaps there are events and activities taking place in your community to highlight this? The issue of poverty was a major concern of the churches during the General Election campaign see the letter signed by the URC to Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer. <https://urc.org.uk/general-election-leaders-criticised-for-lack-of-plans-to-tackle-poverty/>

- How do we live our values of hating evil, loving good and seeking justice in relation to poverty in our own communities?

Affirmation of faith

We belong to the creator, in whose image we are all made,
in God we are breathing,
in God we are living,
in God we share the life of all creation.

We belong to Jesus Christ the true image of God and of humanity
in him God is breathing,
in him God is living,
through him we are reconciled.

We belong to the Holy Spirit who gives us new life and strengthens our faith.
in the spirit love is breathing,
in the spirit truth is living,
the breath of God always moves us.

We belong to the Holy Trinity, who is one in all and Three-in-One
In God we are all made,
in God we are all saved,
in the Spirit we are all united. Amen.

*Second European Ecumenical Assembly Graz 1997
(Reconciliation - gift of God and source of new life)*

Intercessions

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. (Luke 1:52–53)

God who is just, in a world where the rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer, we know that your way of doing things is not being fulfilled. Renew us, inspire us, teach us how to live out our calling. We will seek out those laid low by greed and capitalism, and we will lift them before you. We will fill the hungry with good things and help those with money and resources to use them for the good of all.

Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise. (Luke 3:11)

In a world where tax havens are seen as legitimate and where millions go hungry, we long to build communities where resources are shared. Help us make sure that our churches and projects are places that empower and build up resistance to oppression. Help those with money and gifts to share, use them wisely and generously.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. (Luke 4.18-19)

If our church services and our prayers are not about bringing good news to the poor, then let us repent and start over. Jesus begins his ministry with the call to bring joy and freedom to those who need it most. Let our faith and our churches be led by that same spirit.

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled." (Luke 6:20–21)

God of compassion may those who have gone without know what your way of doing things should be like. Let those who have suffered guide our worship and our discipleship. Let those who are refugees teach us about welcome, let those who are homeless teach us about generosity, let children teach us about hope and joy. Let those who have been imprisoned teach us about being free. Let us turn this world's expectations upside down.

Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. (Luke 6:37)

Let us learn not to judge others, but to love them as they are. Let us learn not to condemn others but to embrace them. Let us learn to forgive, and forgive again, so we may be free from the wounds of vengeance and anger.

Then 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." (Luke 22:19–20)

God who makes all things new, you teach us to share, to love, to reach out to those in need and to be alongside the vulnerable. You teach us to be sacrificial, believing that even if the journey is hard and brings death to old customs – there will always be new life in you. Amen

based on Prayers from Church Action on Poverty (2017)

Offertory

Loving God, you have given us more good things than we need. Help us to share them with those who have less. Help us to be generous in giving.

Gracious God, from you comes every good gift and so this day we bring our offerings of money, together with our time, talents and energy and offer these as an expression of

our thanks for all that we have received. We ask that you bless each gift, so that they may become channels of your grace and a means of sharing your love for the people of our own communities and the wider world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Blessing

Teach us O God to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

May we begin each day with hope, and end each day with gratitude.

May we offer compassion and be mindful of your blessings towards us.

May we be people of peace and may we know your presence with us as we work for your Kingdom to come.

And as this time of worship draws to a close
may the blessing of God, who is known to us as
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be with us now and remain with us always. Amen.

Hymn Suggestions				
	R&S	CH4	StF	MP
New every morning is the love	536	214	137	480
Lord, you have always been our home		54		
Seek ye first the kingdom of God	512	641	254	590
Sent by the Lord am I		250	239	
Look forward in faith		237		
A Rich Young Man Came Seeking			243	
When out of poverty is born		291		
The kingdom of God is justice and joy	200		255	651

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

Lindsey also suggests: [God you spoke your word through Amos](#)

Suggested tune: BEACH SPRING 8.7.8.7 D

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