

# worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 20th  
October 2024  
Proper 24 |  
Ordinary 29

The Revd Jonnie Hill

## Call to Worship

The God of the universe,  
the one who laid the earth's foundations  
and set the stars in their course,  
cares for you, for me, and for every living creature  
and invites us now to divine encounter.

So let us come, full of expectant hope,  
that we will encounter the living God  
in the worship we now offer together,  
in the name of Jesus  
and in the power of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

## Prayers of Approach, Confession & Assurance of Forgiveness

Loving Creator,  
in the whirlwind of life,  
where chaos and order entwine,  
we turn to you, who spoke to Job from the eye of a storm.

We hear your voice, O God,  
speaking to us in the storms of our own lives,  
urging us to grow into mature faith and wisdom,  
calling us to give up over-simplistic ideas  
of sin and punishment, of cause and effect,  
and to embrace the wonder and complexity of this life you have created,  
equal measures beauty and joy, sorrow and pain.

When the flood waters inevitably rise,  
and the light of the sun and stars seems dim,  
give us the courage to ask the tough questions, as Job did,  
that our quest for insight and meaning,  
will bring us closer to you,  
trusting that even in our doubts and questioning,

we are held close in your infinite love and grace.

And may we come to acceptance and peace,  
that when life is unpredictable and feels threatening,  
it is also full of possibility and newness of life.  
Help us to live into this life – of faith and co-creation,  
which is your invitation and gift,  
full of promise and adventure,  
alive in the creative power of the Spirit.

*Pause*

God of all wisdom and grace,  
help us to admit the things we get wrong,  
the times we have clung to certainty,  
or held to outdated beliefs,  
even when your Spirit has been beckoning us on.

Not so we can beat ourselves up  
or play the all too familiar blame-game –  
but so that we can learn,  
that we can repent – make an about turn,  
and grow ever greater into human fullness,  
the picture of true humanity we see in Christ.

*Pause*

Friends, our God is a God of love and new beginnings,  
let us accept the new beginning offered to us now,  
in Christ's name, Amen.

## All Age Activity

For this activity you will need:

- A large clear plastic or glass container
- Water
- A handful of sand
- An implement to stir
- A small candle

Start by showing the clear container filled with clean water. Talk about how this is an illustration of our lives when things are going well – when life is calm, clear and easy to navigate.

Next, sprinkle the sand into the water and use the implement to stir the water to create a cloudy, churning mixture.

Explain that just like the sand in the water, challenges, losses and suffering in life can easily swirl up and make it difficult to see a way forward.

Light the candle and place it beside the container (stir again if needed). Explain that this represents God's constant presence in our lives and that God's light shines even in the murkiest of waters when life's challenges make it gloomy and hard to see.

When the sand has settled, acknowledge the fact that it's easier to see the light of the candle when conditions are clear, but that the challenge of faith is to seek out the light and trust that it is present even when visibility is reduced, and challenges are all around.

You could invite sharing from the congregation at this point or a short prayer to finish.

## Prayer of Illumination

As we listen now to ancient words read from scripture,  
may they be made alive and vital by the power of the Holy Spirit,  
offering insight and wisdom for life, in Christ's name, Amen.

## Reading

*Job 38:1-7, 34-41*

## Sermon Notes

If you are going to preach on this passage from Job, I would suggest you'll need a good working knowledge of the overarching narrative of Job's story. You might want to read the whole book or there are any number of good resources online if you simply search 'summary of the book of Job'.

This passage consists of two speeches that God makes in response to Job's demand to hear from God. At face value, these speeches are perplexing and seem to bear little relation to the specifics of Job's losses and sufferings. Theologians and Biblical scholars, both Christian and Jewish, have for literally thousands of years been trying to understand the meaning of these two speeches with many tomes written on the subject. If you want to focus solely on this passage, I recommend you get your hands on some good quality Biblical commentaries and read what the scholars have to say.

The approach I chose to take was to look at some broader themes that Job's story raises. You could pick up on the problem of suffering and acknowledge the difficulty that many people have of reconciling belief in an all-powerful, loving God with the existence of suffering. It might be helpful to explore the fact that this is a question that both people of

faith and those of no faith often struggle with (for many, this being a main barrier to faith and belief).

You could introduce the concept of theodicy which is the branch of theology that deals with questions of God's goodness in the face of evil and suffering. You could use Job as a case study – a man who was righteous yet faced unimaginable suffering, challenging the simplistic view that suffering is always a result of sin or wrongdoing. You could pick up on the story of the man who was blind from birth as told in John 9 (and Jesus' response when the disciples ask whether the man's blindness was caused by his own sin or that of his parents).

A retelling of Job's story might be another avenue to take considering his righteousness, his suffering, and his friends' attempts to explain it – perhaps relating it to our own experience of suffering and the questions it raises for us. A focus on Job's demand for an explanation from God could easily chime with the experience of some who feel angry with God or even doubtful of God's existence when suffering and loss pay us a visit. And just as God's response from the whirlwind didn't offer simple answers for Job, we too are very often left with more questions than answers too.

You could consider whether Job's experience of these 'speeches' was about hearing specific words from God or whether this passage speaks metaphorically of a moment of divine perspective that came to Job (and can come to us) when confronted with the vastness of God in creation. The kind of moment that any one of us might experience when the smallness of our experience is brought into focus by the vastness of that which is outside us. I have had such experiences at the top of mountains and looking out into the vastness of the sea.

Job's story speaks powerfully about the maturing and transformation of faith – from a faith which knew only prosperity into a deeper, more resilient faith that grows in and through untold suffering. Such a maturing is also about the move from a transactional view of faith (good deeds lead to blessings) to a relational faith that trusts in God's presence even when things are not going our way. Perhaps there's a helpful lesson in the example of Job's friends. When we encounter folk in our own communities who are suffering, let's not follow their lead and offer empty spiritual platitudes or simplistic explanations, but instead, model Christ-like empathy and presence, walking with others through their suffering and witnessing to God's mysterious and persistent, loving presence.

## **Affirmation of Faith**

We love a God who reigns over us not with force and manipulation but with the power of love, to lift us up and set us free.

We follow Jesus, God's Anointed, who shared the power of healing and forgiveness. He was crucified by the powers of domination, but he was raised by the power of love.

We live by the grace of the Holy Spirit, who empowers us to serve humbly, to bless and not to threaten, to create and not destroy. By that Spirit we seek to serve, to forgive, to heal, and to lift up those who are oppressed. By that Spirit alone, and not by any power of this world, we receive life that is eternal and joy that sustains us always.

Alleluia!

Steve Garnaas-Holmes  
from [www.unfoldinglight.net](http://www.unfoldinglight.net)

## Prayers of Intercession

What fresh hell is this, we cry, as we awaken once more to a new day filled with images of violence and war. The tragedies that befell Job seem but the tip of the iceberg, compared to the vast ocean of human suffering in our world today.

In our bewilderment and sorrow, we lift our voices to you, O God, seeking your presence and peace in the midst of chaos.

We pray for the healing of creation, for a world system that is fair for all creatures.

Grant us maturity O God, to give up the myth that infinite economic growth is possible or desirable. May we relinquish all notions of dominion, and embrace our true calling as stewards of this great, green earth.

We pray for all caught up in the crossfire of war, for ordinary people in Gaza and Israel, in Ukraine and Russia.

Inspire leaders to seek justice and reconciliation, O God, so that war-torn regions might have the chance of peace. May we too play our part, in the cause of justice and reconciliation, guided always by the example of Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

We pray for all who are ill in body, mind or spirit, for all experiencing grief or loss.

Bring healing to broken bodies, peace to anxious minds, and comfort to troubled spirits, O God. May each hurting person know the warmth of Your embrace and the support of a loving community.

We pray for ourselves, for all people of faith who struggle to make sense of why a loving God could allow such suffering.

Help us, O God, to hold onto faith in your loving nature even in the darkest of times.

Give us courage to believe in your goodness, and your promise never to leave us or forsake us, no matter what.

As we bring these prayers to you, O God, give us strength to not feel helpless, but empowered by your Spirit, to be agents of hope and love in places of suffering, as in places of possibility and new beginnings.

May we be your hands and feet, co-creators of the world you long to see. Amen.

## Offertory

Anyone who claims to be a 'self-made person' is quite simply deluded. Because there is no such thing!!!

Nothing we can achieve is ever solely on our own merit. Think of the countless people who have offered time and teaching to make us who we are. The opportunities we've been given, the talents and skills nurtured by others... the innate gifts we have been given by God.

We live in a truly interconnected world where all our successes and failures are dependent on a complex web of gifting and receiving.

Let us remember this as we come to offer our gifts of money and our lives back to God.

God, as we offer these gifts, help us to remember all we have received and to give generously from that abundance. May our gifts bring blessings – to one another, and to the world, in Christ's name, Amen.

## Blessing

May the God spoke to Job and who is still speaking today, guide us with wisdom and grace.

As we seek to go onward in faith, co-creators with the Divine, let us embrace the beauty and complexity of creation, trusting in God's unfailing presence and love.

May we walk in peace, bringing hope to a world in need,  
and find joy in the journey ahead.

And the blessing of God,  
loving Creator,  
redeeming Christ,  
enlivening Spirit,  
be with you today and always, Amen.

<b>Hymn Suggestions</b>				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
I bind unto myself today	36	639		
I sing the almighty power of God	43		107	293
Now thank we all our God	72	182	81	486
God of grace and God of glory	344		682	1921
Give to me, Lord, a thankful heart	497		520	
Have faith in God my heart	499		466	1214
Sing for God's glory that colours the dawn of creation		172	116	
Enemy of apathy		593	393	
Lord, you sometimes speak in wonders		606	158	
Have you heard God's voice has your heart been stirred?			662	

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