

worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 2nd February 2025
The Fourth Sunday of
Epiphany
The Revd Andy Braunston

Call to Worship

Gather us into Your presence, O Most High. Let all be welcome here, the lost and forsaken, the blind and the lame, the rich and the haughty, the proud and the strong, the meek and the lowly. **Gather us in!** Gather us into Your presence, Lord Jesus, as we yearn for Your face, as we long to explore our lives and our faith, and as we seek to understand all You call us to. **Gather us in!** Gather us into Your presence Most Holy Spirit. As we meet here around this table nourish us with and teach us to fashion lives that are holy and hearts that are true. **Gather us in!**

Prayers of Approach, Confession and Grace

In You, O Most High we take refuge
for You are a strong rock,
a place of safety in the storm, and a fort in the battle.
When the struggles of life seem too much,
when the waves seem to overpower us and the storms surround us,
we find, in You, our true security. For this we praise You.

In You, Risen Lord Jesus, we find the confidence to follow
despite the wiles of the wicked;
out of our mothers' wombs You bought us,
that we may be a blessing to others. For this we praise You.
Even as we praise You, however,
we become conscious when we've turned away,
when we've been found wicked ourselves,
when we've failed to love and denied ourselves refuge in You.
Give us time, Lord Jesus, to change and turn back to You.

In You, Most Holy Spirit, we find wonder and delight.
Through Your love we find forgiveness and the strength to forgive others,
even the strength to forgive ourselves.
May our hearts and mouths be full of adoration and praise.

In Your life, Most Holy Trinity, we find life;
in Your love we find love; in Your delight we find joy.
Help us to praise Your splendour all day long. Amen.

Prayer of Illumination

Your Word comes to us in many ways, O God,
to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant, always to bring about change.
We hear You in ancient words and contemporary interpretation
but, most of all, we hear You in Jesus Christ, Your word made flesh. Amen.

Readings

Jeremiah 1:4-10 | Ps 71: 1-6 | St Luke 4:21-30

Sermon Notes

During these weeks of Epiphany the Lectionary takes us through the theme of showing God's work to the world. The revelation of Jesus to the gentile Magi continues in our readings as we journey through this season to Lent.

Jeremiah

The reluctant prophet resisted God's call even though he feels inexperienced and not up to the task. Unlike Isaiah's "hear I am send me" albeit after a heavenly vision, Jeremiah is rather more ordinary and pedestrian in his response. In almost every part of the book of Jeremiah we see his reluctance, fear, anxiety, resistance, inadequacy and even resentment that God gave him the task of prophecy. Now, to be fair, God told Jeremiah to forecast doom, an approaching invasion and exile so it's not as if his message would have been welcome! Neither Jeremiah's confidence nor his achievements qualified him – he was qualified by God's call alone. Clearly, if we are to believe Jeremiah, he didn't fulfil the job description. He wasn't qualified! Yet he was chosen, before the ages, and sent.

In an ever more managerial culture we're used to only applying for jobs we can prove we're qualified for. We fill in our equal opportunities applications studiously evidencing all the things in the essential and desirable columns and generally show weary shortlisting panels that we're up to the job. In the upside down values of the Kingdom we're called before we're trained or experienced.

Psalms 71

The Psalmist, ever aware of God's presence, longs for God to snatch him away from his enemies and critics. Like Jeremiah the Psalmist is assured of God's direction even before

his birth but, also like Jeremiah, the Psalmist encounters, detractors and enemies. Here is a plaintive cry for protection, a cry born out of the very real experience of ministry and vocation. Many a cleric has cried for justice and refuge after a difficult period of ministry. Worse, though, the Psalmist needs to be rescued not just from wicked hands but from violence. In the midst of the adversity time is found for praise.

In a world ever more concerned about rights, service delivery, and getting one's own way any vocation to follow God is problematic. People might treat churches as yet another thing to be evaluated and consumed. Whilst we don't, yet, review church services on Trip Advisor it probably won't be too long before Elders are worrying about social media reviews of worship, fellowship, the foodbank, the old folks' group and messy Church.

St Luke

Jesus knew a thing or so about adversity in vocation. Here at his first sermon in his home synagogue he both delights and horrifies the crowd. There must be a background story for why Jesus would not perform wonders in Nazareth; he implies the people want it but also that he's not recognised as a prophet there – worse he draws parallels with Biblical figures who took their ministry outwith Isreal and healed and fed pagans. The good folk of Nazareth clearly didn't like being told the pagans were more favoured than them – God's chosen people – and tried to kill Jesus. As difficult as ministry has been at times I've not, yet, had a congregation try to kill me after a poorly received sermon!

Weaving the threads

The thread connecting these passages, for me, is this sense of vocation. Jeremiah resisting his, the Psalmist suffering with his, and Jesus being true to his despite the threat to his life. It's tempting to wax lyrical about vocation and make it all about a vocation to ordained ministry; yet vocation is about simply responding to God's call – and God calls us all to various forms of ministry. We may look at the newcomer to church and be very annoyed no one is talking to her until we realise it's our job too. We may worry about whether there's enough food in the foodbank and remember that we could donate something. We may see a need for a friendship group for the lonely, a children or youth ministry, a place for asylum seekers to get food, warmth and company, a place for single mums to find rest, a need for a sensory garden or a quiet room in a busy town. We see need around us and it can be overwhelming. We may know we have gifts, skills and abilities or we may, like Jeremiah, have an acute awareness of our ineptitude. We may like Jeremiah be putting off the response to the vocation but we know we need to answer. Like the Psalmist we may be jaded and aware of how ministry in its many forms can drain energy and enthusiasm and realise it is only possible to respond to God through utter dependence on God as refuge and strength. We may realise that in our contemporary secular, post religious world any sense of responding to God's call seems, at best, daft or, at worst, as dangerous. Yet there's still that nagging call, that persistent sense that we have more to offer.

So today for those struggling with vocation; those putting off what they know they are called to, those finding excuses, those discouraged by others, those who doubt they can do it. And pray for yourself that you may hear and follow and, in hearing and responding realise, like the Psalmist, even in adversity we need to sing our praises.

Affirmation of Faith

We believe there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to God's own purpose, **we are convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come,** nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation **will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.**

From Romans 8

Offertory

Jesus tells us to count the cost of discipleship; time and again in the Gospels he makes clear that following him is not easy and makes demands of time, talent, and treasure. We, however, often make discipleship about gentle manners and Victorian hymnody! Instead, we are called to follow and to understand the requirements of committed discipleship. As God's people we are gathered to gain strength for our journeys and to give – of our time, our talents and, at this point, our treasure. We may give in the plate or direct to the bank; we may give a lot or a tiny amount; what's vital is the giving that we might receive from the One who calls us to follow. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus as we follow you, help us to realistically count the cost and find in You inspiration for the journey.
Bless these gifts and the love they represent
that we may use them wisely and be a blessing to others. Amen.

Intercessions

We bring our prayers to God, the Eternal Trinity, who hears our longing, knows our pain, and responds to in love.

Eternal God we lift before you the nations of our world,
places of pain and terror, war and disease
and places of love and joy, diversity and wonder.
Give grace to all how dare to lead in our world,
that they may know wisdom, humility, and the courage to follow You.
Keep always in their minds the plight of the poor,
minorities, and the very earth itself, that we may not perish but live.

God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Risen Lord, we pray that Your Church
will again become a place of safety and blessing,
a place of refuge and energy, a place of calm and meaning,
a place to work out our callings and a place to challenge injustice.
Give grace to those who dare to lead Your Church,
that abuse may be named and dealt with,
that bad shepherds will be removed from office,
and that all members of Your Church will know their calling
and be encouraged to follow.

God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Most Holy Spirit, we pray that the Church, again,
becomes a place of vitality,
where people find nourishment, healing and grace,
and where we may all encourage each other to respond
to the various callings you give.

God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In a moment's silence we bring to God our own needs and prayers...

We join all our prayers together as, with courage we pray as Jesus taught saying...Our
Father...

Holy Communion

Eternal Majesty,
before the ages began you formed the heavens and the earth,
the moon and the stars proclaim your glory,
and all that was created sings your praise.
You make humanity in your own image,
intending us to glorify and enjoy you forever.
Again and again, we turn away from your love,
despite the guidance of your Law and the warnings of your prophets.
In the fullness of time, you emptied yourself of all but love and dwelt with us.

O Jesus, our Saviour,
you proclaimed good news to the poor,
freedom for prisoners,
sight for the blind and liberation for the oppressed,
but we preferred to turn away from freedom
choosing the bondage of sin, and nailed you to the Cross.
Yet you defeated the powers of death and evil
and revealed a new life for all who follow you.

Before you were given over to the powers of your age,
you shared in the simplicity of a meal with your friends,
and, during that meal, you took bread, said the ancient blessing,
broke the bread and gave it to your friends, saying

Take this all of you and eat it, for this is my body which is broken for you.
Do this in memory of me.

When Supper was over, you took the cup of wine, again prayed the ancient prayer of
blessing, gave the cup to your friends and 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
so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in memory of me.

Let us proclaim the mystery of our faith:

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Come, O Holy Spirit, on these gifts of bread and wine,
that they may be, for us, the body and blood of Christ.
Lift us into your presence that our faith may be renewed,
our commitment to follow strengthened,
and our understanding of Church deepened.

Bless those who serve the Church
that through prayerful discernment we may know Your will,
and that we might all be strengthened in our mission
of worship and witness, evangelism and service,
so that the bruised and broken find healing,
the proud and mighty find humility,
and the poor and lowly find their dignity.

Through Jesus, with Jesus, in Jesus, in the loving power of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are Yours, O Most High, forever and ever, Amen.

These are God's holy gifts for God's holy people!
Let us eat and drink as we show forth Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross,
and acknowledge his presence here, risen and ascended,
for our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.
United with the entire Church on earth and in heaven,
we gather here to present our offering of praise and thanksgiving,
to renew the offering of ourselves,
and to rejoice at Jesus' promise to come again in glory.

adapted from *Worship From* page X10

Post Communion Prayer

In our joys and in our sorrows,
in days of toil and hours of ease, in care and pleasure,
You still call us, Eternal One to love and follow You.
So we have gathered at this, Your table,
to remember Your love, discern Your call
and find strength for the journey.
Bless as we depart, that we may remember Your love,
respond to Your grace, and follow Your call. Amen.

Blessing

May the One who formed you in the womb,
the One who calls you to follow,
and the One who speaks in the silence of your heart,
form you, call you and speak to you anew
and the blessing of Almighty God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, or Eternal Majesty, Enfleshed Word, Holy Spirit,
be with you now and always, Amen.

Hymn Suggestions

	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Here in this place		623		
Great God Your Love Has Called Us Here	339	484		
Jesus Calls Us O'er the Tumult	355	509		359
All My Hope in God is Founded	586	192		16
I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say	349	540		275
How clear is our vocation Lord				
Have you heard God's Voice / Disciples of Tomorrow				
O Jesus I Have Promised	509	644		501
To Abraham and Sarah	553			
I The Lord of Sea and Sky		251		857

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