

# worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> February 2025  
The Sixth Sunday of Epiphany  
The Revd Dr Sarah Hall

## Call to Worship

Blessed are those who trust in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD.

**They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream.**

It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green

**In the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.**

## Prayers of Approach

You are our heart's Desire, choosing grace over grudges,  
providing, not withholding; creating community, not standing far off.

You are our Brother and Servant,  
cradling clenched fists in your scarred hands,  
lighting us through the dark times of our lives.

You are the Breath of wonder, blowing death's dust off our shoulders,  
mending our brokenness with resurrection,  
whispering words of peace into hearts full of anger.

*Adapted from Thom Shuman,  
Lectionary Liturgies website*

## Prayers of Confession

Yet we do not always choose to listen.

As we focus on Jesus' ministry of healing,  
we can still hold tight to hatred and fear which continue to damage us.

As we are invited to listen to his teaching,  
we can still become complacent - after all, *we're* all right! –  
and ignore the plight of others.

Yet you have sent him before us so that, as we follow him,  
we may travel from fear and confusion  
to your new life of wholeness and trust.

## Declaration of Forgiveness

Listen: here is good news. Christ Jesus came into the world  
to forgive us in our failure, to accept us as we are,  
to set us free from evil's power and make us what we were meant to be.

Through him God says to each of us:

You are accepted. You are forgiven. I will set you free.

**Amen. Thanks be to God.**

*Adapted from Green, B. (ed.) (1991)  
Baptist Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship*

## **The Lord's Prayer**

### **All Age Activity**

Imagine you're trees. Some of you are planted near a river, and some in a desert. Which will grow? Whose leaves will fall?

*Or*

try to grow different seeds (eg cress, beans) into plants with and without water.

Discuss: If plants need water to live and grow, what do we need?  
(food, warmth, sleep, friends, love, ?)

Where can we find God's love so that, however hard things get, we can grow and thrive?

### **Prayer of Inspiration**

Living God, help us so to hear your Word that we may truly understand;  
that, understanding, we may believe;  
and believing, we may follow your way in all faithfulness,  
seeking your honour and glory in all that we do. Amen.

*Presbyterian Church in the USA*

### **Readings**

Luke 6:17-23 | 1 Corinthians 15:12-20

### **Sermon Notes**

*Luke 6:17-19*

This and the following verses from Luke's Gospel are sometimes called the Sermon on the Plain (see v 17) in comparison with Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, especially vv1-11) which uses some of the same material. Where Matthew describes Jesus' audience (beyond those who have chosen to follow him) as 'the crowds', Luke gives a little more detail: 'people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon'. This reflects the mixed nature of Galilee, in the north of Israel, where Jews and non-Jews were both to be found, leading some in the 'purer' south of the country to look down on them. Yet they are drawn to Jesus by motives common to every culture: curiosity, and the need

for healing in mind as well as body. The word describing the power coming out of Jesus as he heals, *dunamis* in Greek, is also used in Luke's second volume, in Acts 1:8, describing the power promised to the disciples at Pentecost – the Holy Spirit.

### *Luke 6:20-23*

The Beatitudes are well known in many translations and paraphrases, said and sung, including the lively Iona Community version, 'Blessed are the ones I call the poor' used here and the stirring chant to be found in the Orthodox liturgy. In the Daily Devotions service comments on this passage focus on the first three 'blessings' promised by Jesus to his disciples, in vv20-21: poverty, hunger and mourning. Verses 22-23 promise more in the same vein: hatred, opposition and defamation, reflecting the experience of persecuted Christians in the first few centuries AD; and in some parts of the world today, where following Jesus can still be physically dangerous. These promises apply, though, to those mistreated 'on account of the Son of Man': those who, like Jesus, love and serve others, and especially outsiders, sacrificially. In the UK Christians are now more likely to encounter indifference or scorn than active persecution. If we were accused of following Jesus, what evidence could be used to convict us?

### *1 Corinthians 15:12-20*

We come in on a theological argument between Paul and so-called 'wise' people in the church at Corinth, who in his absence have been attacking his authority. Earlier in 1 Corinthians Paul appeals to the congregation not to let themselves be divided into different parties, on Paul's or Apollos' or Cephas (ie Peter)'s or even Jesus' side. Later in the letter, it appears Paul feels he needs to justify his own position as an apostle. Apparently 'the wise' in Corinth have been saying he's no real apostle at all: for only the eye-witnesses of Jesus' resurrection should bear that name. Sadly, today we Christians are still tempted to look down on each other. If we catch ourselves judging each other by our different understandings of resurrection, whether we call each other 'happy-clappy' or 'wishy-washy', can we learn from the Corinthian church's divisions - and from Paul's response, that great hymn to love in 1 Corinthians 13 - to keep our eyes on the risen Jesus, not on each other's perceived faults?

## Offering

We bring to God the whole of who we are,  
our sorrows as well as our joys,  
knowing that we will be accepted.

We bring too our gifts of time and of service and of money,  
to be used for the coming of God's kingdom.

## Prayers of thanksgiving and concern

Let's give thanks to God who sends both sun and rain,  
to make the trees grow, to make the rivers run.  
We give thanks to God for the first signs of spring:  
for bulbs breaking through the earth;  
for leaves budding on the trees.  
We pray for all who feel it is still winter in their lives.  
Be with those who suffer, in body, mind or spirit.  
Give them healing; give them peace.  
Particularly on this Racial Justice Sunday,  
we remember those we know and those we will never meet  
who are unfairly treated because of who they are.  
We give thanks for all who stand up against injustice,  
and for all who give to those who suffer support and love and hope.  
In a moment of silence,  
we name before God those we know  
in need of God's healing, God's justice.

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

Let's give thanks to God who sends both sun and rain,  
to make the trees grow, to make the rivers run.  
We give thanks to God for organisations  
that help folk when there's no money, or no food, or no joy in life.  
We give thanks for all those you know locally  
who serve people in hunger, want or sorrow;  
for agencies working across the country and across the world with all those in need;  
for their volunteers, acting as God's hands, God's feet, God's heart.  
In a moment of silence,  
we name before God those we know and those we will never meet  
who are poor, who are hungry, who mourn,  
asking for hope and the knowledge that you will never leave them.

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

Let's give thanks to God who sends both sun and rain,  
to make the trees grow, to make the rivers run.  
We give thanks to God who has kept us going  
through the dry times of our own lives:  
times when we have not known what to do or where to go.  
And we give into God's hands now our own lives  
and the life of our church,  
asking for guidance, for wisdom, and for trust that God will never abandon us.

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

All our prayers, spoken and silent, we bring now to the God who made us, through Jesus who prays for us, in the power of the Holy Spirit, with us still. Amen.

## Benediction

Through drought, through flood, in bad times, in good times,  
 securely rooted or feeling the winds of change,  
 the blessing of God, Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit,  
 is with us and all people, now and always. Amen

Hymn Suggestions				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Happy are they who walk in God's wise way	669			
Praise to the Lord, the almighty	74	124	88	564
Father of mercy, God of consolation	645			
Be still for the presence of the Lord		189	20	50
Just as I am	364	553	556	396
Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord	234		295	30
Living God, your joyful spirit	530			
The Spirit lives to set us free			397	664

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

Hey my love (from the WGRG book *Heaven shall not wait*)

