

# worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2025  
The 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany  
The Revd Sue McCoan

## Call to Worship

Do not fret because of the wicked;  
do not be envious of wrongdoers,  
for they will soon fade like grass,  
and wither like the green herb.  
Trust in the Lord, and do good;  
so you will live in the land and enjoy security.

(Psalm 37: 1-3)

## Opening Prayer

We lift our eyes to you, wonderful God,  
above the interests and distractions of daily life,  
above the difficulties of the world,  
above our fears and concerns.  
We lift our eyes to you, the source of all life.  
You are the love that brings worlds into being;  
You are the energy of inspiration;  
You are the peace of all eternity  
and we put our trust in you.  
In this time of worship,  
Let us look on you in wonder, love and praise. Amen.

## All Age Activity

Give people some post it labels or pieces of paper around the same size and envelopes and pens. Explain that in our Gospel reading Jesus enjoins us to forgive; we know how hard it is to forgive others when we are wronged and, sometimes, hard to forgive ourselves. Invite people, in a time of silence, to write or draw something on the paper that symbolises either a person they need to forgive or a situation they need to let go of; they might perhaps want to symbolise something that is about how they need to forgive themselves. Assure them that these will not be read and will be burned or shredded (depending on how dramatic you wish to be!). Play some music and give people 3-4 minutes to do this. Then end this time by praying the first part of the confession and then ask them to pop their paper in the envelope and seal it and then invite them to come and either pop through a shredder that you've put there for the purpose or to light from a candle and drop into a metal bucket you've put there for the purpose (any such bucket

should stand on a heat proof mat. You might want to have some paper in their already and set that alight so that the envelopes catch. You should have another bucket of water around just in case; you may find the Elders are happier if you did this activity outside the church! Finish with the last part of the confession. Extinguish fire!

(Andy Braunston)

## Prayer of Confession

God of love,  
we confess to you the times we have let our feelings get the better of us,  
when we have reacted in anger,  
when we have kept quiet out of fear,  
when we have envied success,  
or begrudged sharing our time and gifts,  
when we have been quick to judge and slow to forgive.

*silence*

You are full of mercy; you are kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.  
We claim your mercy now.  
Give us the grace to accept your forgiveness,  
in penitence and faith,  
so that we may live in the light of grace,  
to the glory of your name. Amen.

## Prayer for Illumination

Open our ears to hear your word,  
and open our hearts to receive what you wish to say to us today.  
In the name of Jesus your living Word, Amen.

## Readings

*Genesis 45:3-11,15 | Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40 | 1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50*  
St Luke 6:27-38

## Sermon Notes

*Genesis 45:3-11,15*

Joseph reveals himself to his brothers. Quick recap of the story so far: Joseph's brothers, who sold him into slavery many years before, have come to Egypt to find food during a famine. This is their second visit. The first time, they had come without Benjamin, the youngest, because their father Jacob feared for his safety. They failed to recognise Joseph, but he recognised them. He charged them to go home and fetch Benjamin – leaving

Simeon in Egypt as a guarantee of return. The father was reluctant to let Benjamin go, having already lost (as he thought) Joseph and Simeon. Eventually the famine became so severe that they had no choice. On their way home, Joseph planted a silver cup in Benjamin's sack and accused him of theft, punishable by slavery. Judah pleaded for Benjamin's release and offered to take his place. The brothers' care for Benjamin and compassion for their father is the trigger for Joseph to reveal to them who he really is. The brothers are horrified – all their past guilt is catching up with them. But Joseph tells them that it was not their fault – that God sent him to Egypt so that there would be food for them all these years later. Despite the way they once treated him, he is able to act graciously and generously towards them and to reunite the whole family.

### *Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40*

Psalm 37 is a wisdom psalm, addressed to people rather than to God and containing advice on how to live. Specifically, it is about how to live in the face of evil and injustice. V1 suggests our instinctive reaction to wickedness is anger and resentment. The Hebrew verb translated as 'do not fret' means 'do not get heated', suggesting a kind of impotent rage. However, the psalm goes on to say, this response is not helpful. Verses 2-11 offer an alternative approach, based on trust in the Lord. Verses 2 and 10 remind us that the situation will not last for ever; wicked people will die like anyone else. V3-5, 7 and 8 begin with verbs of instruction or commandment: trust in the Lord, take delight in the Lord, commit your way to the Lord, be still before the Lord, refrain from anger. 'Be still' (v7) is the stillness of patient watching, rather than rest. After each instruction is the benefit that will be gained: security, a granting of desire, and above all the promise that the Lord will act. V11 speaks of the meek inheriting the land, but meekness is nothing to do with passive acceptance. Instead, it is about conserving our energies to respond to evil in a constructive and healthy way.

### *1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50*

The whole of chapter 15 deals with the resurrection of the dead, and specifically the idea of the resurrection body. Many of the Corinthian Christians were from a Greek background where there was a widespread view of the body as an encumbrance to be shed on death, and therefore any resurrection would be a purely spiritual existence. Paul is at pains to point out that the Christian belief is in a bodily resurrection. In 15:3-9 he cites the appearances of the risen Jesus to support this, including his own encounter on the road to Damascus. The resurrection body, though, is not of the same form or nature as our earthly bodies. Paul does not specify what it will be like but he sees it as something wonderful, a new creation beyond our imagining. This doctrine matters to Paul because he sees it as a sign of God's glory.

### *St Luke 6:27-38*

The passage comes from the gathered teaching known as the 'Sermon on the Plain'. Jesus is showing how to respond in love when people treat you badly: pray for enemies, bless

those who curse you, turn the other cheek, give to anyone who asks, do not judge, and forgive. We all know the principle; we also know how hard it is to apply it.

### *Preaching Suggestions*

There is a common thread in these readings of 'rising above' - rising above human emotions, being raised to new life after death – and of looking to God to effect the transformation. It might be too complex to put all this in one sermon. If you choose 2 readings:

Luke and Psalm 37 – Jesus calls us to high standards of behaviour; Psalm 37 shows how to achieve that, not by gritting our teeth and trying harder but by putting everything into the hands of God.

Luke and Genesis – the story of Joseph opens up ways of thinking about forgiveness. The brothers never say they are sorry, and Joseph never says he forgives them. But the change in the brothers' attitude towards the family, especially their father, shows that repentance (metanoia, turning) has taken place. And the response of Joseph shows total forgiveness. Forgiveness is about the rebuilding of relationships – not 'letting someone off the hook.' You could include present-day examples of people asking for forgiveness without repentance, as well as cases where forgiveness has brought transformation.

### Offertory Prayer

Loving God,  
You give us so many good things,  
all that we need and more than we can ask.  
We bring our gifts to you in response to your generosity, and as a sign of our thanks.  
Accept and bless all that we bring, and all that we are;  
use us and our gifts to serve you in whatever way you direct.  
In the name of Jesus, Amen.

### Prayers of Intercession

Loving Lord Jesus,  
You knew what it was to be mocked,  
betrayed, falsely accused and sentenced to death.  
Give your strength to those who suffer injustice,  
to all who have unhealed wounds or unmet needs,  
to those who live in fear.  
We give thanks for peacemakers and peace-keepers and all who work for justice.

You breathed forgiveness even in your deepest pain.  
Look with compassion on those who are unable to forgive,  
those who are in the process of forgiving,

those for whom reconciliation is out of reach.

We give thanks for people who have forgiven, and for lives that have been turned round.

You brought healing to people and asked nothing in return.

Bring your healing and peace to those who are unwell in body, mind or spirit.

We name before you... *(names on prayer list)*

*and/or*

We take a moment of silence to name in our hearts those for whom we are concerned today... *(time of silence)*

We give thanks for all who work in health and social care.

You called unsteady Peter to be the foundation rock of your church.

Give wisdom and vision to your church today.

We pray for this congregation... (local grouping, churches together, synod...)

We give thanks for our elders and all who give their time and gifts to serve you in this place.

Loving Lord Jesus,

we ask all these prayers in your holy name. Amen.

## Blessing

May the grace of God surround you.

May the peace of God fill you.

And may the love of God fill your heart and your home, today and always. Amen.

Suggested Hymns				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
God of mercy, God of grace	575			
The great love of God	105	358		
Make me a channel of your peace	629	528	707	456
The love of God comes close	107		654	940
Help us accept each other	646			
Forgive our sins as we forgive		486	423	
Great God, your love has called us here	339	484	499	
There's a wideness in God's mercy	353	187	416	683
Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing	360		494	
And Can It Be	366	396	345	33