

# worship notes

from the United Reformed Church



**Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> February 2026  
The Fifth Sunday of Epiphany  
The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith**

## **Justice-shaped Living: light, truth, love**

### **Call to Worship**

We come on our own,  
we come together.  
We come with our excitement  
and with our lack of expectation.  
We come with our longing and our pride.  
We come with our words and with our silence.  
We come to you, God of truth,  
with our hands and hearts open,  
asking that you reach out to us afresh.

Show us your truth,  
direct our paths.  
You, alone, can change our lives.

So we worship you –  
God of all that gives meaning to life.  
We worship you. Amen.

### **Prayer of Adoration**

Holy and gracious God,  
You speak through prophets and poets,  
You shine through Christ, the Light of the World,  
You stir our hearts by your Spirit  
until we lift our eyes again to your glory.

We worship you  
for your justice that rolls down like waters,  
for your mercy that meets us in our weakness,  
for your love that refuses to let us go.

We praise you  
for creating us to shine with your light,  
to season the earth with hope,  
and to live as signs of your grace.

Receive our adoration,  
spoken and unspoken,  
as your people gather in your name. Amen.

## Prayer of Confession

Forgive us, loving God,  
for the times we have sought our own glory  
and lit our own lamps.  
Forgive us  
when we have hidden the light you have kindled in us,  
when fear has dimmed our discipleship  
and pride has overshadowed your grace.

Shine the light of your humility and mercy  
into our hearts,  
that individually and together  
we may reflect the obedience  
and the self-giving love of your Son,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

## Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news:  
The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness has not overcome it.  
In Christ we are forgiven;  
in Christ we are renewed.  
Thanks be to God.

## For all the Family

### *Making a difference*

You'll need 2 eggs, a spoon, two glass, some water and some salt

*Jesus says: You are salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.*

In Jesus' times, salt was considered very special and valuable, so special in fact that Roman soldiers were paid partially in salt. Salt adds flavour to food and makes it nicer. As Christians, Jesus asks us to be like salt.

So how does salt make a difference?

Let me show you.

Take a glass, fill it with water and using the egg place the egg into the glass. What happens? It should sink to the bottom.

Do the same thing with the second glass but before you put the egg in add 2 tablespoons of salt and mix well. Now, using the spoon add the second egg into the glass. What happens? It should float.

See how salt makes a difference. Jesus says be like the salt of the Earth. Make the world a better place.

Be flavourful. Let kindness, honesty, and love fill us so other people feel encouraged and happy around us.

Be a preservative: Do the right thing, even when it's hard, so our choices help others stay good and keep from getting "spoiled" by mean behaviour or bad ideas.

Be noticeable in a good way: Salt stands out, so let your good actions—sharing, helping, including others—stand out and show what it means to follow Jesus.

A quick note for older kids and teens

- Salt also has a community effect: one person living with integrity can influence many others. Your words and actions can inspire friends, siblings, and classmates to be kinder, braver, and more thoughtful.
- If you're feeling unsure, start with one small habit—like smiling at someone who looks lonely, helping a classmate with a task, or choosing to speak kindly when you're frustrated. Small acts of saltiness can add up to big, positive change.

## Introduction to the Readings

Today's Scriptures draw a straight line from the cry of the prophet Isaiah to the teaching of Jesus on the hillside. Isaiah reminds God's people that true worship is not outward performance but lives shaped by justice, compassion, and liberation. And Jesus, using images of salt and light, calls us to a faith that is visible, transformative, and grounded in God's long faithfulness. Let us listen for the Word of the Lord.

## Readings

*Isaiah 58:1–9a | St Matthew 5:13–20*

## Sermon Notes

### 1. Opening: The Everyday Images

Salt. Cities. Lamps. Common, ordinary, mundane—yet loaded with meaning. Jesus uses them to make the call to discipleship unmistakable.

### 2. “You Are the Salt of the Earth”

- a. Salt as vocation. Necessary, preserving, flavouring, life-giving. Salt losing saltiness = forgetting its purpose.
- b. Jesus’ real question. Have we forgotten what we are for? Has the Church lost its tang through caution, weariness, anxiety? Righteousness = visible faithfulness, not moral superiority.

### 3. “You Are the Light of the World”

- a. Light’s nature. It spills; it cannot help but shine. A city on a hill is unavoidably visible. A lamp hidden defeats its own purpose.
- b. Our light points beyond us. Good works → glory to God, not to ourselves. We are lanterns, not the flame.
- c. Hiding the light. Often done out of fear, self-protection, or desire to avoid challenge. When we hide, we dim others’ chance to see God.

### 4. Isaiah 58: The Old Testament Echo

Jesus stands in continuity with the prophets. Isaiah critiques false worship: ritual without justice, piety without compassion. God’s chosen fast: justice, liberation, mercy. When we live this way: “your light shall break forth like the dawn.”

### 5. Righteousness as Visible Justice

Jesus is not replacing the Law/Prophets—he is fulfilling them. God’s law is rooted in liberation (Exodus story). To lose this is to lose our salt and cover our light.

### 6. Risks for Today’s Church

Governance, safeguarding, reputation—important and necessary. But can they make us timid? Do we soften our saltiness? Hide our lamp? Do we avoid prophetic witness because it feels safer?

### 7. “Unless Your Righteousness Exceeds...”

Not stricter rule keeping. Not moral superiority. A deeper alignment of the heart with: mercy, justice, liberation. The commandments are the starting point, not the end.

## 8. The Church the World Needs

A salty Church: preserving what is good; refusing to lose its edge.  
A luminous Church: refusing to hide what God has lit.  
A justice-shaped Church: feeding, welcoming, liberating, forgiving.  
A God-reflecting Church: whose visible life points beyond itself to God.

## 9. Closing Prayer

May our salt never lose its flavour. May our light shine boldly and freely.  
And may all who see our good works give glory to God alone. Amen.

## Prayers of Thanksgiving

Generous God,  
we thank you  
for daily blessings—  
for kindness received,  
for strength renewed,  
for hope rediscovered  
in ways small and significant.

We thank you  
for Christ who walks beside us,  
for the Spirit who empowers us,  
for the Church that surrounds us  
with fellowship and prayer.

For the light that guides our feet  
and the salt that flavours our living,  
we give you thanks. Amen.

## Prayers of Intercession

We pray, gracious God,  
for your Church throughout the world—  
may we be light bearers and truth tellers.

Where there is disappointment,  
may we shed the light of encouragement.

Where there is corruption,  
may we shine the light of integrity.

Where there is uncertainty,  
may we offer the light of clarity.

Where there is complacency,  
may we bring the light of challenge.

Where there is rejection,  
may we hold out the light of acceptance.

We pray for our world:  
for peace where conflict rages,  
for justice where people are silenced,  
for compassion where suffering overwhelms,  
for wisdom for leaders  
and courage for peacemakers.

We pray for all who are unwell,  
all who grieve,  
all who are lonely,  
all who fear the future.  
May your healing surround them.

And we pray for ourselves:  
that we may walk, pray, and serve  
in humility and hope,  
so that others may see you in us  
and give you glory.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Sending Out Prayer**

May you be as salt where there is staleness;  
light where there is darkness;  
truth where there is unbelief;  
and love where there is great need.  
And the blessing of God Almighty  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
Be amongst us and remain with us  
This day and for evermore. Amen.

### Hymn Suggestions

	RS	CH4	StF	MP
As A Fire Is Meant for Burning		252		
Christ is alive let Christians sing	260	416	297	
Christ Be our light		543	706	1201
Come My Way, My Truth, My Life	352	579		
Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness		348		
There's a Spirit in the Air	329	616	398	
Christ is the world's true light	601	456		
Brother, sister, let me serve you	474	694	611	1261
Lord, the light of your love is shining		448	59	445
In the darkness of the still night			109	
The Kingdom of God is justice and joy (if not used last week)	200		255	651
God weeps at love withheld		168	700	
Send down the fire of your justice			413	
Show me how to stand for justice			713	
The Church of Christ in every age	636		415	
Colours of Day	572		167	1039
The Spirit lives to set us free			397	664

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