

worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 12th April
The Second Sunday of Easter
The Revd Andy Braunston

Call to Worship

Come to worship,
come and give thanks for our imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance
kept for us who are surrounded by God's power.

We come to worship!

Come to worship,
come and give thanks for our salvation,
despite your trials and tribulations, come and give thanks!

We come to worship!

Come to worship,
pledge anew your allegiance despite your doubts,
offer your service despite your weakness,
offer your joy despite your sorrows.

We come to worship.

Come to worship for Christ has risen!

Christ is risen indeed!

Prayers of Approach, Confession and Grace

We give thanks to You, O Ancient of Days,
for You give us new and everlasting life,
an eternal inheritance that will not wither or decay.
You reveal our salvation to us and bring us joy.

We give thanks to You, Risen Lord Jesus,
You are to us more precious than gold.
Even though we cannot see or touch You,
we believe and rely on You even as we doubt,
and long for that day when You will be fully revealed.

We give thanks to You, Most Holy Spirit,
for in You we find our joy and fulfilment;
in You our restless hearts find their repose,
our ancient hungers are satisfied,

and we discover our salvation.

And yet, despite our thanks, O Trinity of Love,
we complain and grumble.

Despite the gifts You lavish up on us,
we demand more.

Despite the faith we have,
we find it easy to fail to trust in You.

Despite the satisfaction You bring,
we crave for more and plunder the earth and its people.

In our relentless hunger we forget both the simple things of life,
and the simplicity of life itself.

Give us time, O God, to change.

In Your loving kindness help us turn our lives around.

In Your insistent love help us to

love and forgive ourselves,

love our neighbours,

and, in this, rediscover our love for You. Amen.

People of God, hear the good news!

The Lord is your portion and cup;

the Lord gives you good counsel and is ever before you.

The Lord does not give you up nor abandon you to the Pit,
but instead shows you the path of life and fullness of joy.

So, accept the grace on offer and discover
everlasting pleasure in God's service. Amen!

Prayer for Illumination

When our hearts and minds are fearfully locked from inside, O God,
slip in behind our defences and appear to us, as Your word,

ancient, yet ever new, is exposed, proclaimed, and lived.

That we may feel your peace, see your wounds, and believe. Amen

Reading

1 Peter 1:3-9 | St John 20:19-31

All Age Activities

Some all age activities devised by the URC's Youth and Children's Team can be found here
<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Families-on-Faith-Adventures-Week-103-How-Will-You-Meet-Him.pdf>

1 Peter

Scholars think this letter is later than the Apostle Peter's death (c64) and uses more eloquent Greek than would be expected from an Aramaic speaking Galilean fisherman so believe it is unlikely to have been written by him. Of course, there's no way of knowing with any certainty who wrote our New Testament documents. The letter offers encouragement to Christians enduring persecution that had become part of the Roman response to this new religious movement. The current suffering conforms to the Maker's will, Jesus' own suffering, and the sustaining ministry of the Spirit. The writer is probably Jewish, or very informed in Jewish Scripture and theology – the ritual imagery of the Passover and Exodus are used just after today's passage. The key sentence is, I think, "Although you have not seen him, you love him, and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." which links our experience with that of those early Christians who hadn't, themselves, encountered Jesus in the flesh but love and serve him. This links with our Gospel reading where Jesus commented "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." The resurrection is the key moment in history where all is made new but "for a short time" the old unrenewed world lingers – seen in the persecution and suffering of the Early Church and seen in the sin, oppression, and eco-suicide seen in our own. Yet the writer asserts God has given us a new hope in Jesus' resurrection. In the past they have been given a new birth and living hope, in the future they are assured of an eternal inheritance even if, in the present, there is suffering. It seems odd to think about assurance in persecution as giving us hope now as, in the West at least, the Church suffers not persecution but indifference and trouble of its own making. Yet the point is that, whilst the immediate future might be grim, the ultimate future is assured. The key, for the writer, in navigating the present was the hope in the future.

Psalms 16

The Psalm begins asking for protection and confesses absolute dependence on God. The poet aligns herself with those who also have devoted themselves to God in a faithful community standing in contrast to another unfaithful violent community. The writer compares and contrasts these two groups. The Psalm starts with the cry for protection; as a refugee seeks protection so does the Psalmist in God's love and care. Like one who has had a good inheritance of land, the Psalmist is grateful and sees, in God, the source of her inheritance. The relationship between God and the poet is one of mutual faithfulness; God's fidelity to the Psalmist is reflected in her faithfulness towards God. As in our reading from 1 Peter where a faithful community is encouraged to remember God's own fidelity, here God is thanked for His love, protection and blessing. God's loving kindness is for all who, like the Psalmist, put their trust in divine providence; at Easter we remember that God's loving kindness extends beyond the grave.

Protestant Christians, disliking the crucifix as a symbol, use the empty cross or the empty tomb as symbols of hope and new life. For the disciples gathered together however, these were symbols of confusion and trauma. Unable to believe Mary Magdalene's witness the empty tomb was not so much a sign of resurrection but of disappointment and fear. Had their Lord's body been taken and defiled? Would the authorities come after them next? Locked down together one can imagine their fears making them spiral – no wonder Jesus' first words are of peace. Breathing himself into them, Jesus commissions them for the work of declaring forgiveness, preaching his gospel to a wounded and traumatised world. Thomas, unsurprisingly, doesn't believe his friends – they'd not believed Mary either. For Thomas seeing is believing yet for us we have to believe without seeing and this means a leap of faith; faith that healing will come, faith that justice will prevail, faith that God's ultimate future will be one of blessing contrasting with the disasters on our immediate horizon. The Catholic practice of having a crucifix in churches has something to offer here. In the wounded body of Christ we find new life and transformation. Life is found in the excruciating agony of death; peace is found in torture's torment, healing is found in scars. What might this offer us as the Church in the West is in decline? Congregations die and hope seems to be extinguished in an indifferent world trapped by the Fall where governments are snared by pride, corruption, events, and the crises of late capitalism, and nature itself is poisoned by the pollution of human greed. There's hope for those who believe that things will be different, that God's kingdom still breaks in, that in death we find new life.

Weaving the Threads

We live in gloomy worrying times with the rise of new style dictators, with some very old agendas, the cracking of alliances that have helped keep Europe and the West peaceful for 70 years or so, responses to globalisation which threaten our economic certainties, and the changing of our domestic politics in ways which make the future look very uncertain. Our immediate future, even our middle term future looks worrying but our passages today assure us of a long-term ultimate future which is in God's hands. As the Reformed we believe we should let God be God. That means putting our ultimate trust in God and God's providence – not in some naïve fatalistic way, but in a deep and secure trust that, despite the vicissitudes and crises of our time, God's reign will come. As the writer of 1 Peter puts it we have an "inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." We look to the future with some trepidation even as we look to our final destiny with secure and lasting hope. Hope needs to be nurtured, it needs to be sustained by looking beyond the present and immediate future to the bigger picture – where our inheritance awaits and is being protected even from the wannabe dictators, cracked alliances, changing economic realities and uncertain politics. Jesus' assurance that those who believe but don't see offers us hope – a state of expectation pregnant with anticipation which confirms and renews our faith.

Affirmation of Faith

We sing to our Lord a new song;
we sing in our world a sure hope:
God loves this world, called it into being,
renews it through Jesus Christ, and governs it by the Spirit.
God is the world's true hope.

We know Christ to be our only hope.
We have enmeshed our world in a realm of sin, rebelled against God,
accepted inhuman oppression of humanity, and even crucified God's son.
God's world has been trapped by our fall,
governments entangled by pride, and nature polluted by greed.
Our only hope is Jesus Christ.

After we refused to live in God's image,
Jesus was born of the virgin Mary,
sharing our genes and our instincts,
entering our culture, speaking our language,
fulfilling the law of our God.
Our only hope is Jesus Christ.

In His death, the justice of God is established;
and forgiveness of sin is proclaimed.
On the day of the resurrection,
the tomb was empty; His disciples saw Him;
death was defeated; new life had come.
God's purpose for the world was sealed.

God will renew the world through Jesus,
who will put all unrighteousness out,
purify the works of human hands,
and perfect their fellowship in divine love.
Christ will wipe away every tear; death shall be no more.

There will be a new heaven and a new earth,
and all creation will be filled with God's glory. Amen

*adapted from the Reformed Christian Church of America's
Our Song of Hope*

Intercessions

O Most High,
we bring our prayers to You for our world, the Church, and ourselves.

We pray for places where hope runs thin,
where warfare, famine, disease and violence run rife...

pause

Rise up, O Most High, a people of hope,
that looks beyond the crises of our time
to see and work for the imperishable, undefiled, and unfading hope that You bring.

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

Risen Lord Jesus,
we pray for the Church
persecuted and ignored, glorious and sinful, serving and shameful.

pause

Rise up, O Risen Lord, a hopeful Church,
that looks beyond itself, its problems, and its crises,
to see its imperishable, undefiled, and unfading mission that You give.

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

O Holy Spirit,
we bring to You ourselves and those we love.
We pray for those in any kind of need,
 those in the news, and those forgotten about;
 those who are hungry and destitute, and those who have too much;
 victims of crime and those who harm others.

pause

We pray for those in need in our own community

pause

We pray for those we love who are ill in mind, body, or spirit...

pause

We pray for ourselves....

pause

Rise up, Most Holy Spirit, hope in our hearts
that we may remember our ultimate future is imperishable, undefiled, unfading
and in your hands alone.

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

Offertory

We are a people of hope! To have faith is to have hope that the way things are can change, that the ultimate future given to us by God is secure even as we live in an evermore insecure world. One of the certainties of our world is that we need to give; we give to support the causes and charities which are dear to us, we give to counter the consumerism that poisons our souls and we give to make a difference. We give in so many ways, through offering our time, talents, and treasure and so, at this point in our worship we give thanks for all that has been given. Let us pray:

God of hope,
we thank You for these gifts,
for the love, time, and commitment they represent,
and for the ministry they will fund.
Keep us ever hopeful, and ever trusting in Your good future,
Amen.

Blessing

May the One who knew you since before the foundations of the world,
the One whose love for you drove Him to the Cross,
the One who offers you hope amidst the gloom,
hold you, love you and give you hope.
And the blessing of Almighty God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit or Eternal Majesty, Enfleshed Word, Energising Spirit
be amongst you and remain with you,
now and always, Amen.

For hymns please see separate Eastertide document on
<https://urc.org.uk/your-faith/prayer-and-worship/worship-notes/>