

worship notes

from the United Reformed Church

**Sunday 22nd March 2026
The Fifth Sunday of Lent
The Revd Jenny Mills.**

Call to Worship

‘Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!’

We come to worship you, Lord of all.
We bring before you:
our thanks and praise, our hopes and fears, our joys and sadness.

‘I wait for the Lord; my soul waits, and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.’

As we join together in worship we offer all we are to you.
Through song, prayer, music, reflection, and silence.

We come just as we are, knowing that you meet us here.
Knowing that we are loved, precious, unique, and special in your eyes.
Bless us as we join together.
May we worship with our whole being and find hope, strength and love
to empower, inspire and enable us as we journey on.

‘O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.’

Let us sing!

Prayers of Approach, Confession and of Forgiveness

Living and loving God,
You are greater than we can imagine or truly know.
And yet we see evidence of your might and power in all creation.
From the tiny seed to the massive mountains,
the small child to the giant elephant,
to the beauty of flowers, the chaos of the sea and the wonder of new life.
We see so much around us in our communities, homes,

workspaces and social settings that reminds us of your amazing love –

 how love grows,
 how friendships develop,
 how problems are solved,
 how decisions are made.

All of who we are, is because of you.

Everything we do, say, touch, feel, and taste
is because we are fearfully and wonderfully made by you.

You are creator of all that is, and we worship you.

You sent your Son to be born, live, minister, die,
and be resurrected so we may truly know
the height, depth, breadth, and width of your love.

And you send your Holy Spirit to guide, encourage, challenge and inspire us.

Gracious and loving God, we are grateful for your love in our lives,
for all we have, all we are and all we shall be.

And yet, despite all that we know and experience, we still fall short.

We turn from your will and way.

We choose our own paths and fail to listen to your promptings and warnings.
Our own comfort and care comes before that of our neighbours - far and wide.
Our own interests come ahead of calling out where others are oppressed,
marginalised, forgotten or persecuted.

Our lives do not speak of abundance for all or of flourishing that includes all.
We are attracted by the security of knowing we are OK and fear to rock the boat.
And yet Jesus showed us that your desire is for all to know love, safety, hope and joy.

Forgive us for the times we put our own interests before others.

For the times we fail to trust you.

For the times we fall short as loving disciples.

And help us reflect, consider, and turn back to you.

Help us to prioritise living the Jesus way in how we are in relationships
and in our everyday lives.

Help us to be thankful for your love and make our lives visual responses to that love.

You sent your Son so that all may know life and life in all abundance:
let us know we are forgiven, loved, and free, through his sacrifice of love.
And help us forgive ourselves, forgive others, and turn back to you.

Jesus says, 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest'
In the name of Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

Loving God, as we encounter your word in Scripture
may we find challenge and comfort.
Through the texts and through our musings and reflections,
may we come closer to you and learn more about your love in the world.
Open our eyes and hearts to your presence. Amen.

Readings

Ezekiel 37: 1-14 | St John 11: 1-45

An All-Age Activity

Read the story of [Funnybones by Allan and Janet Ahlberg](#)

OR

Doing the skeleton Dance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e54m6XOpRgU>

OR

The Delta Rhythm Boys: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVoPG9HtYF8>

Sermon Notes

Ezekiel 37: 1-14

The book of Ezekiel is set in Babylon, beginning in the fifth year of the Babylonian exile (593BCE). Following the capture of Jerusalem in 597BCE it is thought that Ezekiel was brought to Babylon with the first group of exiles. He is identified as a priest of some importance and in the exile was highly regarded and consulted by the exiled elders. As modern-day readers we find some of his words and behaviours bizarre and today's reading, a vision experienced by Ezekiel, is one such well-known prophecy. As a prophet Ezekiel is called to look out and warn Israel about their behaviour, turning from God's ways; but he also promises a future renewal and restoration.

(Notes taken from the Roots Resource)

Ezekiel's visions of judgement and of restoration are equally radical. Seeing Jerusalem as a baby 'thrown out in the open field' and 'flailing about in your blood', he announces 'you were abhorred on the day you were born' (16.4-6) and makes clear that 'You must bear

the penalty of your lewdness and your abominations' (16.58). Because Israel was recalcitrant from the beginning, restoration is nothing less than the dead being brought to life. The prophetic word works a new creation, first forming the body and then bringing the breath of life, as in Genesis 2.7. In the depths of their despair, considering themselves to be 'cut off completely', the exiles' only hope is in the word and work of their God, who creates and renews.

John

The Gospel according to John contains a number of signs demonstrating Christ as the life-giver. His signs are not chance events, they make God known in Jesus. The fourth Gospel is different to the other three Gospels, named the Synoptics, meaning 'seen together' as they are similar. It was the last written and probably had knowledge of at least one of the other Gospels. The Gospel of John emphasises Jesus' divine identity and power whilst having some overlap with the other three Gospel narratives. But it is different in style. There is a phrase that says: The Gospel of John- a child may paddle in it and an elephant may swim in it. This means that there are deeper meanings in his writing and it can take time to really understand beyond the immediate teachings.

(Notes taken from the Roots Resource)

This is the last and greatest of the signs in John, by which Jesus reveals, 'I am the resurrection and the life.' Its climax is Jesus' command, 'Lazarus, come out!' The crowd will shout out for Jesus' death (19.6,15), but in Jesus' shout we hear God's life-giving Word. We have stubborn male disciples, thinking Jesus will awaken Lazarus by rousing him from slumber, and perceptive female followers. Martha expresses the belief in Jesus that brings life in his name (see 20.31), and Mary leads Jesus to the tomb, anticipating anointing him for his own impending burial (12.1-8). The sign affects the judgement for which Jesus came into the world (9.39). While many of his own Jewish people who were present believe, their leaders now plot to put both Jesus (11.53) and Lazarus (12.10) to death. Lazarus, like his sisters, is presented as both a friend and a disciple of Jesus. The little we are told about him is highly significant. Lazarus both loves and is loved by Jesus, and Lazarus welcomes Jesus into his home (12.1-2). His love for these siblings may explain why Jesus is so deeply moved and begins to weep when the grieving Mary comes to meet him, and this is what some of those present assume. But from the outset Jesus knows that he will raise Lazarus for God's glory. He is disturbed again when he comes to the tomb and says, 'Take away the stone.' All this foreshadows his own death and resurrection, and it may be that his disturbance, his weeping, and his prayer at the tomb, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me' are John's equivalent of the other Gospels' account of Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. And if he is weeping also for his friends, it is perhaps because he knows what the cost of their faithfulness will be, something Thomas has already glimpsed as he urges his fellow disciples to go with Jesus to Lazarus' tomb: 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

Themes

- Life in all abundance- what does that look like? Lived in relationship and community.
- Life lived waiting for heaven or life in all its fulness now? What is eternal life- it begins now while we are here on earth.
- What does all this mean? Bones coming to life and people being raised from the dead? What does resurrection mean for us today?

Prayers of Intercessions

These model prayers use the Taizé chant Jesus Remember Me as a response.

Gracious God,
we bring our prayers to you.

We begin with prayers for our hurting and broken world. For the situations around the world that cry out for peace and safety. For all people affected by climate change, natural disasters, and the consequences of humankind's selfishness. We also give thanks for the helpers, the rescuers, the carers and peacemakers, for people speaking up and stepping out to offer solidarity and hope.

Silence

Jesus, remember me...

We hold before God those we love and care for, those known to us, our local community.

Silence

Jesus, remember me...

We name the political situation at home and abroad.
For governments and leaders.
For those in power praying that they will lead with wisdom, integrity and compassion.

Silence

Jesus, remember me...

For the coming week in our church, community, country, and world.
We bring to God the pressures, situations, opportunities and concerns we have.

Silence

Jesus, remember me...

Finally, we pray for ourselves, that we may find peace and love and find ways of being both vulnerable and authentic in relationships and in community.

Silence

Jesus, remember me...

All these prayers we offer in Jesus' name. Amen.

Offertory

God calls us to think about how we use all we have.
So, we come as people of faith,
bringers of God's kin-dom,
called to share with others that which we have received.
Through our giving God's love can be more clearly seen, known and experienced.
Come, let us pray:

Gracious God, we are fortunate to have shelter, warmth, food and freedom
and to know your love in our lives, transforming and empowering us.
As you give to us, so we respond, with our lives, our time, our hearts.
We offer our gifts, talents, money, and time
to be used for your purposes in your world.
May all we offer bring light and love as it is shared.
May all we offer be a force for good.
May all we offer be a blessing.
In your world, for your people, until your kingdom come. Amen

Blessing

Our service has ended but our service in the world has just begun.
Go out into the world to know and be love.
God out into the world knowing God goes with you, just as you are.
Go out into the world seeking to be the person God wants you to be.
Go out into the world seeking to bring justice, peace and hope.
Go out into the world and live the abundant life God wills for all.
Go out into the world to sow seeds of love.
And the blessing of God Almighty,
Creator, Son, and Sustainer,
be with you and those you love, now and always. Amen.

Hymn Suggestions

	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Jesus calls us here to meet him		510	28	
Come down, O love divine <i>or</i>	294	489	372	89
Spirit of truth and grace		608		
Come, Holy Spirit, descend on us		589	374	818
Lord, from the depths to thee I cried (Psalm 130)		87		
O Christ, you wept when grief was raw		734		
Days of Elijah				1012
As a fire is meant for burning		252		
Jesus' hands were kind hands	197	351		
The kingdom of God is justice and joy	200		255	651
We lay our broken world		721	718	
Jesus Christ is waiting		360	251	
I danced in the morning	195	404	247	
Beauty for brokenness		259	693	806
Longing for light (Christ be our light)		543	706	1201
Earth, earth, awake; your praises sing		420		
We sing a love that sets all people free		622		
The Spirit lives to set us free		664	397	664

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