

worship notes

from the United Reformed Church



**Sunday 1st March 2026
The Second
Sunday of Lent
The Revd Andy Braunston**

Note

The Lectionary offers a choice of Gospel readings, I have gone with the John 3 passage for the simple reason it's not one I often preach on; this means that the Transfiguration story is not in these Worship Notes but notes on Transfiguration can be found under 15th February.

Call To Worship

I lift up my eyes to the hills- from where will our help come?
Our help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

God will not let your foot be moved;
the God who keeps you will not slumber.
The God who keeps us neither slumbers nor sleeps.

The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike us by day nor the moon by night.

The LORD will keep you from all evil; God will keep your life.
**The LORD will keep our going out and our coming in
from this time on and forevermore.**

Psalm 121

Prayers of Approach, Confession and Grace

O Most High,
we praise and adore You for Your loving kindness,
which called Abraham and Sarah of old,
which called the disciples to follow Jesus,
and which calls us now in the trials and tribulations of our own age.
We thank You, and ask for Your strength to follow.

O Lord Jesus,
we respond to Your call and, in that response,

find blessing upon blessing,
new life and love, forgiveness and fellowship.
In You our restless hearts find their rest,
and our ancient yearnings are stilled.
Yet we know that You bless us
that we might bless others;
You shower Your grace upon us
that we might be a source of loving kindness in a lonely world.

O Holy Spirit,
so often we prefer the shadows to the light,
the ways of the world to Your ways.
We try and bargain with You,
and compromise with the principalities and powers of our age,
in the hope we may find an easier way,
trusting in our own ingenuity
rather than in Christ's faithfulness.
Forgive us, good Lord, and give us time to change,
that we may follow You in the light. Amen.

Here the good news,
the promise that Abraham and Sarah would inherit the world
did not come to them, or to their descendants, through the Law
but through the righteousness of faith.
In faith, then, believe you are forgiven and called;
you are blessed to be a blessing!

Thanks be to God who has forgiven, called and blessed us! Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

Bless us, good Lord, with Your Spirit,
as we listen for your Word read and proclaimed,
that we might be blessings to others,
signs of Your steadfast love,
and faithful disciples of Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, Amen.

All Age Activity

Mapping faith journeys - Explore steps in our faith journeys.

You will need: five large cards, saying:

'Starting line', 'Walking', 'Running', 'Resting', 'Next Level'.

Spread the cards out in a line across the available space – they represent a faith journey. Invite people to ponder where they are in their journey of faith. Use the following questions to help people think about this:

Are you just starting out, an enquirer? Are you walking along, developing your rhythm? Are you progressing nicely, jogging along well? Are you resting in a place of peace? Are you ready to take your faith to the next level? As each question is posed, invite a few people who feel that is where they are to come and stand by the card. In a smaller gathering, you could invite everyone to participate. Encourage people to chat to those around them, e.g. How does it feel to be at this place? How did you get here? What were the milestones? What is your next step?

From [Roots on the Web](#)

Readings

Genesis 12:1-4a | Psalm 121 | Romans 4:1-5, 13-17 | St John 3:1-21

Sermon Notes

Genesis

Genesis contains the origin stories of our faith; a collection of parables showing deep truths where the ancients tried to deal with the paradox of creation and evil, glory and tragedy, sin and sanctity. In the parable, humanity did well in the Garden of Eden until left to our own devices when disobedience and blame shifting resulted in expulsion and envy, violence and murder. No wonder God is depicted as repenting His creation; not even a flood and starting again solved the problem of human sinfulness. So, in these short verses, the ancients have God's Plan B, Abram and Sarai, an old couple told they will be the ancestors of a great nation – no wonder Sarai laughed! Abram and Sarai were blessed but, as Biblical theology tells us, they were not blessed for their own sakes but blessed to **be** a blessing. Good things were bestowed upon them so that they might be an instrument of blessing for others. This is the mission of the Jewish people and also of the Church which, by baptism, has been grafted into the Chosen People. Blessing was sometimes conceived of as wealth and heirs but, through Abram and Sarai and their faithfulness, God created a people, gave them holy law, and showed how justice and righteousness led to blessing whilst selfishness and sin led to destruction. For Christians the story continues with Jesus' life, death and new life, something we dwell on, in particular, in these Lenten Sundays as we approach Holy Week and Easter. The Genesis stories and the later ministry of Jesus show us that God chooses again and again to be intimately bound up with the fate of humanity. Ours is not a God who sits back and watches the world go to hell in a handcart but enters into our lives, our agonies, and our glories taking our pain and offering it back to Himself. The Biblical authors have God grieving, and sometimes getting angry, about human wickedness but never have God giving up on us. God bound Himself, and binds Himself, to His people; just as Abram and

Sarai were chosen by God to be a source of blessing so are we; God won't desert us. God's fidelity costs God His own life on the Cross. God has not revoked the Covenant with the Jewish people, instead God has included us within it. The Church, alongside the Jewish people, is God's plan for humanity. We are blessed by God not to be smug or self-satisfied but to **be a blessing to others**. We are called to live holy lives not for hope of heaven but to show heaven on earth. We are God's plan for humanity; a fact which should make us tremble. A plan which leads us always back to Golgotha where God's plan cost God's own life.

Psalm 16

This Psalm may have been originally used as a call and response – much as we had it in the Call to Worship. It is fitting for approaching a sacred space and for reminding us, in times of trouble, that God is our refuge and strength. One can see why these words would have given comfort to Calvin's Geneva surrounded by hostile and unreliable powers as it might have given comfort to the ancient Jewish people always wary of their neighbours and precarious foreign alliances. The hill from where our help comes might have been a literal reference to the Temple in Jerusalem, built on a hill, or a metaphorical reminder to lift our gaze to God and not always demand God's presence in the immediacy of our crises. The opening lines remind us that we always stand in need of God's help, the next tell of God's faithful constancy neither slumbering nor sleeping. The Psalmist tells us of danger can be found even in nature and God's protection (though this raises some questions about the nature of that protection as clearly harm does come). It might be counter cultural an environmentally aware age, but the Psalmist told us not to rely on nature which also stands in need of redemption; instead we are to rely only on God. Might this assertion be helpful in the face of the climate crisis where human sin causes changed weather patterns, floods, storms, and winds like never before? The final verses have God preserving us from evil; this is more than protection from harm but something deeper. This isn't temporal but spiritual protection from evil. The Psalmist reveals much of God's nature – God is majestic helper, faithful keeper, and eternal preserver. The questions and answers of the Psalm help us navigate the dilemmas of life with God's certainty. No less than in ancient Israel, or Calvin's Geneva, we need to lift our eyes from the trials of the day to see the eternal strength and guidance of the one who blesses us to be a blessing to others.

Romans

Jesus, his disciples, and Paul were all Jewish; their starting assumptions about God and the world came from their Jewish faith. The first Christians were also Jewish – Jesus' followers and early converts found in Christ an approach to faith and life that accorded with their Jewish upbringing yet also understood that God was made known to them in the flesh, in Jesus. God fearers – pagans that worshipped at synagogues were amongst the first converts and then gentiles started to join the Church. Paul's mission was to convert both Jew and Gentile into being followers of Christ; he persuaded Jewish Christians that pagan converts did not need to become Jewish first through the rite of

circumcision and persuaded Gentile Christians to obey some very gentle food laws to help Jewish sensibilities. The task for Paul, and for the first Jewish Christians, was to show that the God of Abraham and Sarah was the same God of Jesus – more, that in Jesus this same God was made known to the world. This is why we have all that writing in today’s passage from Romans about faith – Abram’s faith, before the Law was given, saved him just as faith in Christ saves those who come after the Law. It was a temptation for gentile Christians to reject Jewish faith, life, scripture and practice and to make Christianity yet another sect in the ancient world. Yet the Church resisted this move seeing that the God portrayed in the First Testament is the same as is portrayed in the Second. Abraham and Sarah’s God is the same God that Jesus prayed to and embodied. Paul did not wish to say that God’s covenant with the Jewish people had ended but that, instead, the Church is grafted into this covenant. In Jesus the God of Abraham, Sarah, and all those Old Testament judges and prophets, is revealed anew. In the Romans passage Paul writes to an embryonic congregation made up of, mainly, Jewish converts to Christianity and reminds them that Abraham is the father of us all and that Abraham’s posterity includes both Jew and Gentile who can find God in Christ through faith. Paul is concerned to show that faith – there’s a debate if he means Christ’s faith or our own – is what matters. Not what we do, nor what we can earn, but faith in the loving kindness of God which knows no end and which welcomes us all home is what matters.

St John

The editor of John’s Gospel doesn’t give us much about context here. We’re given a few details of Nicodemus and this encounter must have had an effect as, later, we read that he intercedes for Jesus with other Pharisees and, at the end of the Gospel he goes with Joseph of Arimathea to bring spices for Jesus’ burial. We wonder if he took risks in coming to Jesus as the editor notes here, and again in 19.39 that he came at night. Maybe the nighttime visit in the dark is why Jesus says much about coming into the light at the end of today’s passage but a little after where the Lectionary suggests we stop. Like many disciples in dangerous places now Nicodemus had to be circumspect and careful, discrete in the face of danger in order to preserve his own safety. He was a member of the religious establishment yet told Jesus that “we know you are a teacher who has come from God” which is quite a declaration of faith. In every age the Church has wrestled with how to cope with persecution. In the book of Revelation, the writer condemns “Nicolaitans” who were Christians willing to take part in the pagan rites in order to avoid persecution. Calvin referred to those sympathetic to the reform of the Church - but who were reluctant to be publicly identified with it - as “Nicodemites”. The German Christian movement in the 1930s tried to accommodate National Socialism with Christianity; maybe they were another manifestation of Nicodemus trying to ride two horses at once. They were condemned roundly by the Confessing Church who noted God’s claim on our whole lives. Nicodemus is almost there in today’s passage; he understands Jesus is from God and God’s power is with him but fails to see that to be born again – to be reconstituted through faith and baptism – is required to truly see the coming Kingdom. Some Christians are happy to stop at v16 and to see faith as merely intellectual assent; believe and we’re saved. Many others, however, see belief as more than this, to come out of the dark – unlike Nicodemus

– and into the light. In other words to show faith through word and deed. Then we are truly born again.

Weaving the Threads

The Church often misunderstands Jewish theology as one based on doing things rather than belief and yet, in that misunderstanding, falls into the trap of believing we have to, somehow, earn or justify God's loving kindness. Paul goes to great lengths to show that Abraham and Sarah were made right before God through their faith which led them to act – in their case to leave their home and land to journey with God and believe He had a destiny for them; even though that destiny made Sarah laugh! The Psalmist reminds us to lift our eyes from the trials and tribulations of our current world and see God at work offering us guidance and protection – though experience tells us the protection might not always be what we expect or want. The Gospel story shows the interaction between Jesus and Nicodemus – one with much to lose yet who knew the truth. Nicodemus, however, couldn't quite bring himself to let the implications of his faith be worked out in his everyday life. Where might we be reluctant to allow our faith to be seen in everyday life? Are we embarrassed to be known as Christian? Are we reluctant to let our faith influence how we vote, how we shop, and how we use our money? Are we reluctant to make a stand in a world which tries to value difference but struggles when that difference is counter-cultural? Are we content only to remain in the shadows or willing to stand in the light?

Affirmation of Faith

**We believe in God, Creator of all things, seen and unseen.
who, in the beginning created light from darkness,
land from sea, animals and all living things.
God created humanity from the dust of the earth,
but in the divine image.
In the fullness of time God chose a people to be a light to the nations.**

**We believe in Jesus,
anointed by God, born of Mary, raised a Jew,
who preached good news to the poor and freedom to the captive.
He gave sight to the blind and proclaimed God's favour.
Calling people to live in the light of God's righteousness,
He was betrayed and tried in the secrecy of night.
He was given over to torture and death.
But God did not leave Jesus in the grave
and called him forth to new and everlasting life.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit,
who grafts us to the Chosen People by faith,
who calls us to follow in both the light of day and the dark of night,**

**who calls us to be the Church,
a blessed people seeking to bless humanity.
We seek all that enhances life now,
and look for the life of the Kingdom
breaking through into the gloom of our world. Amen.**

Intercessions

O Most High we pray for our world,
a world which You love most fiercely and tend most graciously.

We remember before You places of pain and division,
where the nations rage furiously together,
where there is neither peace nor justice,
where divisions are made into weapons,
and where ideology is used to maim.

We remember the Earth, herself,
longing for redemption from humanity's cruel exploitation,
where species go extinct,
where resources are plundered,
and where climate change brings death and destruction.

Give us the strength to follow You,
to speak Your words of truth,
and to bless the world with Your love.

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

Risen Lord Jesus, we pray for Your Church,
for which You died and which you sanctify with Your love.

We pray for places where the Church is persecuted,
where believers meet in secret for fear of the authorities,
for where responding to Your call results in imprisonment and death;
sustain Your faithful people.

We pray for those who know Your truth
but who stay fearfully in the shadows;
may they have the strength to come out into the light.

We pray for the Church in the West,
where indifference, scandal, wealth, power and history
hinder our proclamation of Your loving kindness.

Give us the strength to follow You,
to speak Your words of truth,
and to bless the world with Your love.

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

Most Holy Spirit,
we pray for those known to us in any kind of need...

we pray for those who would wish us harm....

we pray for those we find it hard to love...

we pray for ourselves...

Give us the strength to follow You,
to speak Your words of truth,
and to bless the world with Your love.

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

We gather our prayers together as we pray as Jesus taught saying...Our Father...

Offertory

In the light of day we bring our gifts to God;
gifts of time, talent and treasure.

We give to a difference through the relief of suffering and poverty
and through the advancement of Christianity.

Our gifts, by themselves, might not make a huge difference
but, together, are agents of the coming Kingdom.

We give in a variety of ways through offering a listening ear
or a supportive shoulder to cry on,
through practical efforts in a range of good causes and, of course with our money.

In church we give through the plate,
sometimes using those little envelopes,
through filling in Gift Aid forms,
through a wide variety of fund raising activities
and through giving directly to the bank.

We give to make a difference,
we give to be a blessing to others
in response to the blessings we have, ourselves, received.
And so, we give thanks for all that is given:

God of every good gift,
You bless us that we might be a blessing to others;
bless these gifts that, through them,
the light of Your loving kindness
might be experienced in the shadows of our world. Amen.

Communion Prayer

Let us remember the Last Supper Jesus shared with his friends
as recorded in the Gospel according to St Matthew:

“When it was evening, Jesus took his place with the twelve; and while they were eating, he said,

‘Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.’
And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another,
‘Surely not I, Lord?’

Jesus answered,

‘The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.’

Judas, who betrayed him, said,

‘Surely not I, Rabbi?’

Jesus replied,

‘You have said so.’

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said,

‘Take, eat; this is my body.’

Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying,

‘Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.’

When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”

Ever since that final meal Christians have gathered together to share bread and wine, to remember Jesus' words and actions, and to receive from Him the gift of his own self.

So, we gather today to remember Jesus' words, to respond in faith to the one who calls us to be blessings to others, to receive him, as we receive this bread and wine, and find food for our bodies and sustenance for our spirits.

We pray, that as we receive these simple gifts, we may, through faith, be lifted into Jesus' presence, filled with his Spirit, and inspired to bless others as we have been blessed ourselves.

And so we pray:

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people, and renew the face of the earth.

Come Holy Spirit, overshadow these gifts of bread and wine that, through them, we may receive Christ's body and blood.

Come Holy Spirit, transform us into truly being the body of Christ, that we may be a blessing to our world and the Church a sign of the coming Kingdom.

All this we ask, through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, in Your unity, Most Holy Spirit, knowing that all glory and honour is Yours, O Most High, forever and ever, Amen.

Post Communion Prayer

You, great God have created all things for your name's sake. To all people, you have given both food and drink to enjoy, in order that they might give you thanks. But to us, you have freely given spiritual food and drink and eternal life through your servant Jesus. We give you thanks because you are mighty. To you be the glory forever.

Remember your Church, O Lord, deliver her from all evil and perfect her in your love make her holy, and gather her together from the four winds into your coming kingdom. For yours is the power and the glory forever. Amen.

adapted from The Didache

Blessing

May you recognise the call of One who called Abraham and Sarah!
May you respond to the call of the One who died and rose to new life!
May you respond to the call of the One who blesses you to be a blessing!
And may the blessing of Almighty God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be with you now and always, Amen

Hymn Suggestions				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
The God of Abram Praise	121	162	91	645
There's a Wideness in God's Mercy	353	187	416	683
I To The Hills Will Lift Mine Eyes / I lift my eyes	726	81	830	281
Gracious Spirit Hear our Pleading		613		
If You Believe and I Believe		771		
You Lord Are Both Lamb and Shepherd		355		
At the Name of Jesus	261	458	317	41
Be Thou My Vision	489	465	545	51
O Jesus I Have Promised	509	644	563	501
In Christ Alone			351	1072

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