

Sunday service



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 7th June 2026
Proper 5 | Ordinary Time 10
The Revd Andy Braunston

Call to Worship

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,
and pay your vows to the Most High.
Call on God in troubling days for God will deliver us,
and we will glorify God in our lives and our prayers;
we will honour God in our mercy and our singing.

Prayers of Approach, Confession, and Grace

Come, let us return to the Lord, for he will heal us and bind us up.
Let us pray.

O Most High, your appearing is as sure as the dawn;
You come to us like refreshing showers,
like the spring rains that nourish the earth.
We meet You here seeking Your wisdom.
We praise You seeking your blessing.
We listen to You seeking your direction for our lives.

O Risen Lord, we meet You here,
aware that Your love is steadfast
whilst ours is like a morning cloud, as dew that evaporates quickly.
We bring you our worship, poetic prayers, and rousing hymns,
yet You ask for steadfast love.
We give You our time hoping you will be pleased with us,
yet You ask for knowledge of God and Your ways.
We worship you on Sundays but all too often ignore You on weekdays;
yet You demand mercy, and lives lived with a sacrifice of praise.
Forgive us, Risen Lord, and give us time to change.

We gather in Your presence, Most Holy Spirit,
knowing our faith will make us whole,
longing for Your power within us, yearning to follow Your lead
as we worship, evangelise, witness, and serve,
showing the Church's mission in our world.

Give us the grace to accept the forgiveness You bring,
forgive ourselves, and forgive those who have hurt us. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

Like the sick in need of healing, as sinners in need of wholeness,
we listen to Your word, O God, read and proclaimed,
and pray that, through Your Holy Spirit,
we may live it in our daily lives. Amen.

Readings

Hosea 5:15-6:6 | Psalm 50:7-15 | St Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

All Age Activity

Prepare a display with several examples of pairs of well-known people or characters between whom mercy (in some form) has been given and received. For example, Cinderella/the ugly sisters; Roger/Cruella de Vil (101 Dalmatians); Wreck-it Ralph/Felix – children’s films are a rich source for this. The display should mix up the pairs – the game is to match them.

Divide those present into teams. The first task is to name the characters and match the pairs up. Ask people to think about the connection between each pair. When they have found them all, ask: What is the overall connection between all the pairs?

Invite people to think about what mercy means to them. When have they been shown mercy, and when have they given mercy to someone else? Invite a few people to share briefly an example. This week we are exploring what it means to live mercifully, to show love and compassion to our neighbours and those we live and work alongside in our communities.

From Roots on the Web

Sermon Notes

Hosea

Those we call prophets in the Old Testament were people convinced that God had spoken to them and given them a message for either the king or the people. Hosea ministered in the second half of the 8th Century BCE from the reign of Jeroboam II (787-747) to that of Hoshea (c731-722), the last king of Israel. After the long reign of Jeroboam, a succession of rulers and coups ensued as the nation was caught between the rival superpowers of its age – Egypt and Assyria. One of the kings paid tribute to the Assyrian ruler Tiglath-pileser III (745-727) who was set on expanding the Assyrian empire. In 733, in response to machinations of Israel’s king seeking to put an anti-Assyrian king on the Judean throne,

Tiglath-pileser annexed Galilee, occupied the coastal plain, and exiled part of the population. The strife between Israel and Judah is reflected in the passage just before today's. Hoshea, the final northern king, tried to play Egypt and Assyria off against each other resulting in the new Assyrian emperor, Shalmaneser V invading, carting more people off in exile, and ending the separate existence of the northern kingdom of Israel as a Jewish state. Hosea prophesied the end of Israel seeing it as punishment by God for their sins. Famously Hosea took a woman as a wife who was unfaithful to him; embodying in his own life Israel's infidelity to God. The book's treatment of Gomer, however, is troubling as we're never told her side of the story; the fact she's a metaphor for the people should not detract from the appalling sexism and misogynistic violence in Chapter 3. Today's passage has God saying He will not return to the people until they repent. We are left waiting for a response from the people, and God's exasperation in the final verses is clear; the people's love is like a morning cloud or dew that evaporates. The final verse in today's selection demands love not sacrifice; knowledge of God not burnt offerings. What might these words mean for us? How sincere is our religious life? Do we focus on worship more than lifestyle? Correct rituals rather than steadfast love?

Psalm 50

This Psalm, along with Psalms 81 and 95, and might have been used liturgically at the festivals of Passover, Pentecost and Succoth. Elements of these festivals included animal sacrifice at the Temple. The Psalmist calls the people to obey even as God testifies against the people. A healthy relationship with God will involve discipline, and even reproach and the Psalmist's introduction of God's voice in the Psalm reminds us that worship is not primarily a human activity but one centred on God. The wider text of the Psalm has a theme of silence – when the people sinned God was silent but now God is breaking that silence to speak out; it's a trial and verses 1-6 set the scene with God's arrival, and witnesses and the accused being summoned. The trial, and God's speech full of mocking irony, is today's passage. The Psalmist has God contrasting the ritual sacrifices of animals with the moral sacrifice of thanksgiving and obedience; this is a theme seen in many places in the Old Testament (eg Isaiah 1:10-15, Amos 5: 21-5, Micah 6: 6-8). After today's passage two possible outcomes are given – punishment for those who forget God or conversion for those who turn back. The Psalm sets up the response of the people which might be seen in the next Psalm, 51, that great hymn of repentance. Do we assume that our worship practices are what's important but neglect mercy? Do we remember that the rest of the week is where God sees our hearts and lives, not just in the hour on a Sunday?

St Matthew

This passage has three themes: eating with sinners and tax collectors, the healing of a woman with a haemorrhage and the raising of child. It's a fast moving passage with some pitfalls. **Sinners** were those who violated family or community welfare and might be shunned by their community or family. Matthew implied that **tax collectors** were associated with sinfulness. Luke alluded to these office holders taking more money than

they were entitled to (Lk 3: 12-13). Rabbinic sources treated tax collecting with disdain and they were seen negatively in the wider Roman Empire generally because they charged more tax than they had to pay to Rome - becoming rich as a result. Jesus' attitude is quite tame towards them considering the disdain with which they were held and seems to endorse paying the required tax to Rome – a tax, of course, an oppressed people had to pay to fund their own oppression. Yet the editor used the tax collectors as a foil to the Pharisees (who disapproved of them) “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick”. Tax collectors, whilst being disapproved of, were not cast out of their community (Luke 18.10 located a tax collector in the Temple). So it's not so much Jesus with outcasts but Jesus with people who were seen as sinners. In v13 Jesus echoes Hosea 6.6 (the end of our OT reading) teaching that mercy takes precedence over sacrifice but his words in (5:23-24 about offering gifts at the altar) make clear that sacrifice is not eliminated. Mercy is required and maybe sacrifice without it is meaningless. That is a consistent OT theme. In the healing of the woman, she grabs the **fringe** of his cloak - the tzitzit that Jewish men wear to remind them of the commandments. The woman's haemorrhage would have meant she was **ritually impure** and so unable to attend worship at the Temple – though she would have been able to worship at home and in Synagogue. (see Leviticus 15). This ritual impurity, however, is not mentioned in the text (though it often is by preachers!) and so may not have mattered in her everyday life in the village. Jesus is not made ritually unclean by being touched by the woman (as hands would not convey ritual impurity). This is not a story about Jesus liberating a woman from sexist laws but about him healing her of a debilitating and embarrassing condition due to her great faith. As in Zechariah 13. 1-1, 14: 20-21 she is healed of ritual impurity not from ritual impurity codes which along with food laws and Sabbath observance were, and are, important parts of Jewish identity. You might want to continue the theme from the Psalm and Hosea and ponder mercy and sacrifice, faith and healing, and how worship is meaningless if one's heart is not right.

Weaving the Threads

The three passages knit together well. There's an element of active faith in each; the crowd press on Jesus but the unnamed woman reaches out and touches him – Jesus says her faith has made her well. She did something. Psalm 50 is a rebuke of those who don't have active faith – they attend to the rituals but not the sacrifice of thanksgiving nor the obedience to God's Laws. In Hosea we have a people desperate enough to play off the great superpowers of their age instead of putting their faith in the greatness of God. Misplaced faith lead to disaster. They attended to the outward rituals of worship but not the inner absolute need to have faith in God and God's provision. The unnamed woman knows God will heal her through Jesus and, in her need, reaches out to him finding healing. She demonstrates the steadfast love and knowledge of God that was lacking in the people in Hosea and the Psalmist's times. These passages do not condemn the Law or the rituals – after all the woman would have had to have gone to a priest to have her healing certified before she would attend Temple worship again – but demonstrate need for faith, mercy, and obedience as we reach out to God. Our worship, our rituals (and yes

we have rituals) are only life giving and affirming if they spring from steadfast faith, obedience to and trust in God.

Affirmation of Faith

**We believe in God, the Eternal Majesty,
source of all justice and mercy,
who does not ask for empty rituals
but for hearts that acknowledge God's sovereignty.
When we turn away, seeking security in power and politics,
God awaits our return, yearning for our steadfast love
that is more precious than any sacrifice.**

**We believe in Jesus Christ, the Enfleshed Word,
who sat at table with sinners like us,
who heard the silent plea of the woman
who believed in the power of touch.
In Jesus, we see that God's mercy
is not a reward for the righteous,
but a balm for the broken.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Flame of Love,
who moves through our restlessness
and drives us toward change,
who sustains us when our faithfulness
is as fleeting as the morning mist,
reminding us that God's grace
is as sure as the dawn.**

**We believe the Church is an agent of God's mercy —
touching the world with the promise of holiness,
seeking justice for the oppressed,
and living as a forgiven and forgiving people yearning to be free. Amen**

Intercessions

O Most High, we pray for the Church,
in places of persecution and places of indifference,
that we develop a steadfast faith in You, that we exhibit mercy,
and that our rituals, practices, and services of worship
glorify You as they lead us to right living.

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

Risen Lord Jesus,

we pray for those who yearn for You and the healing You bring,
victims of crime ignored by the authorities,
women, children, and men fearful of not being believed
when they disclose abuse,
mothers and children yearning for peace whilst men make war.

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

Most Holy Spirit, we bring before You our own communities...

those in need whom we can help...

places where we can be salt and light...

those known to us ill in mind, body, or spirit...

those in the news today...

and those who are suffering known only to You...

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

Hear our prayers, O God, as we pray as Jesus taught saying, Our Father...

Offertory

Scripture gives us pause as we ponder bringing our offerings; our readings today remind us that God is interested more in the quality of our lifestyles than the generosity of our giving, the sincerity of our faith more than the willingness to give. Yet that isn't to say that God isn't interested in our generosity or our willingness to give just that these things should be reflections of our steadfast faith, our commitment to mercy, and our obedience to God's ongoing call. So we pray for all that is given in this church asking that God will help us to use our resources with mercy, wisdom, and faith. Let's pray:

God of every good gift, You shower us with untold blessings,
and now, of Your own do we give You,
that our blessings may be gifts to others,
speaking of Your loving kindness and steadfast fidelity. Amen

Holy Communion

May God be with you! **And also with you!**
Lift up your hearts! **We lift them up to God!**
Let us give God our thanks and praise!
It is right and just to give our thanks and praise!

We gather at this table hungry for justice,
thirsty for righteousness, and eager for mercy in a cruel world.
In the midst of lies and 'alternative facts'
we come to hear and speak truth;
in a bitter society we taste honey from the rock of God's mercy.

As we gather, O God, we remember Your steadfast goodness and mercy,
for You chose the Jewish people as Your own, gave them precious law, guarded them
with judges, guided them with brave prophets
who called them, again and again, back to You,
sustained them through the bitterness of exile,
restored them with glorious freedom,
and suffered with them through the agony
of imperial invasion and oppression.
In the fullness of time, You became one with them, one of them,
one with us, one of us.

Lord Jesus, You satisfied our ancient hungers,
and through Your life, teaching, healing, death, and new life,
we are reconciled to the Eternal One,
called to do justice, show mercy, and live in kindness.

Yet we prefer the shiny apple, the bitter fruit,
rather than the taste of justice and the love of truth.
We prefer the ritual to the faith;
we prefer our possessions over our souls.
We believe we can beat the systems of our world
using our own power and politics instead of Your steadfast love.

Yet Your Cross shows the power of weakness,
the glory of love, and both the horror and beauty of sacrifice.

Before You were given over to torture and torment,
You shared in the simplicity of a meal with Your friends,
and, during that meal, You took bread, said the ancient blessing,
broke the bread and gave it to Your friends saying:

"Take this, all of you and eat it, for this is my body,
broken for you. Do this in memory of me."

Later, You took a cup filled with wine, again said the ancient blessing,
and, giving the cup to Your friends, said

"take this all of you and drink from it,
for this is the blood of the new and everlasting covenant,

shed for you and for all for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this in memory of me.”

So let us proclaim the central mystery of our faith:

Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!

Come, Most Holy Spirit,
as we, in obedience to the Lord Jesus’ command
show forth His sacrifice on the Cross
by this bread broken and wine out poured.

Gather us into Your presence as Jesus, himself,
risen and ascended, is here giving himself
for our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.
United with him and with the whole Church on earth and in heaven,
we, his people gathered at his table
present our sacrifice of thanksgiving
renew the offering of ourselves,
and rejoice in the promise of his coming again in glory.

All glory, honour and power be Yours, Eternal Majesty,
through Jesus Christ, our risen and ascended Lord,
in the power of the Holy Spirit, forever and ever, Amen.

The body and blood of Christ, given for you!

Post Communion Prayer

Lord Jesus we thank You,
that, like a mother You have fed us with Yourself,
lifted us to the heavenly places, increased our faith,
and reminded us of Your faithfulness.
Bless us as we go from this table,
to be steadfast in love and knowledge of You,
that our blessings may be a blessing to our world. Amen.

Blessing

May the One whose love never ends,
the One whose faithfulness led him to the Cross,
and the One whose mercy is unfailing,
allow you to love others, keep you faithful, and help you embody mercy.
And the blessing of Almighty God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, **or** Eternal Majesty, Enfleshed Word, Enduring Spirit
be with you, now and always, Amen.

Hymn Suggestions				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Hail to the Lord's Anointed	127	474	228	204
Jesus Calls Us Here To Meet Him		510	28	
Jesus Calls Us O'er The Tumult	355	509	250	359
In the Name of Christ We Gather		677		
Will You Come and Follow Me?	558	533	673	
Come With Me Come Wander/Sing Hey for the Carpenter			462	
When Jesus the Healer		350		
We Cannot Measure How You Heal	653	718	655	
Jesus Christ is Waiting		360	251	
Lord of Life We Come To You		782	651	
O Christ The Healer We Have Come		717	653	
At the Name of Jesus	261	458	317	41
Be Thou My Vision	489	465	545	51
I Heard The Voice of Jesus Say	349	540	248	275

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