

worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 12th July 2026
Proper 10 | Ordinary 15
The Revd Jenny Mills

Call to Worship

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.
Gracious God we come to worship you today.

Accept my offerings of praise, O LORD,
and teach me your ordinances.
We come to give thanks, to learn and grow.
To gather in community and to offer ourselves in service.

Your decrees are my heritage forever;
they are the joy of my heart.
I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end.
We come with joy in our hearts at all you have done for us.
And hope welling up within us of possibilities and promises of all that is to come.

We come as your people,
human, fallible, broken,
but joined together by your love
and accepted, loved, and enough, in your eyes.
Bless this time service and may we encounter your living Spirit
through our time together.
Let us sing!

Prayers of Approach, Confession and Grace

God of abundance, who loves us beyond our comprehension,
who created the world we see around us,
who sent his Son to live and teach,
and who sacrificed his life to show us your love,
living on in hearts, minds and the whole of creation, we adore you!

God of all creation, who made all that is
and continues to create through seasons and changes,
who blesses us with sights and sounds, smells and tastes,
who calls us to notice the blessings all around us,
reminding us of the beauty of nature

and the wonder of your world, we adore you!

God of power and might,
who calls us to live together in unity and harmony,
who has given us all we need,
who showed us through Jesus how we should live together in peace,
and keeps seeking the good for humanity, we adore you!

We are blessed and loved. We are known and treasured.
We are enough, just as we are.

And yet, your way calls us to live well together.
That living well begins with us being faithful to your way.
Your unconditional love calls us to respond,
to repent, to review how we live
and consider what changes we need to make
so we can truly reflect your love and your glory
to those alongside whom we journey.

But we fall short. We fail to maintain good intentions,
we mess up and get it wrong, we make excuses,
we argue, complain and deny.

Forgive us Lord for the times when we are so narrow minded
that we forget our responsibility to our fellow siblings in Christ;
when our faith is small and selfish;
when we are so busy looking out for ourselves
that we don't understand the importance
of making space to listen to you.
Your love calls us to be bringers of your kingdom here on earth.
Your Son's sacrifice reminds us
that we are your to be your voice, hands and feet in the world.
Forgive us and give us the heart and will
to begin again and turn back to you.

Jesus says, come to me all you who are heavy laden
and I will give you rest.
We claim that rest and the forgiveness of the risen Saviour.
Let us know ourselves, forgiven, loved and free.
May we forgive ourselves, forgive others and go in peace. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

Sow the seed of Your word amongst us, O God,
that as it is read and proclaimed,

we may hear, understand and obey,
that good roots are put down
and you may reap an abundant harvest. Amen.

Andy Braunston

Reading

St Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23

All Age Activity

A version of beer pong!

You will need 6 paper cups and 3 ping pong balls. Put out 6 cups in a row of three, two and one (in a triangle shape) at the end of a table. Ask a couple of people to have a go at throwing the three balls and seeing if they can get any into the cups. See who wins!

The point of this is that it is often hard to get the balls in the cup - it depends on so many things: the thrower, the table, the bounce, the ball, the size of cup... In today's reading, we hear of the sower who, I think, would have been dreadful at this game! The sower threw the seeds randomly, not taking care about getting the seed in the right place. This story is less about getting the seed into the right place and more about the abundant act of scattering, we will be thinking more about this in the sermon. Maybe if each person had 10 ping pong balls it may have been easier to win at the game?

Notes on the Readings

The Gospel according to Matthew was written for an audience that would have been familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures and the book presents Jesus as the fulfilment of these texts. Jesus is portrayed as the new Moses who fulfils the Old Testament prophecies. It is widely agreed that the Gospel includes 5 Discourses. This reading from Matthew is regarded as being in the third Discourse and is known as the Parabolic Discourse because it contains parables relating to the Kingdom of Heaven. This particular parable reminds us that some people received Jesus' words and teaching and embraced it and others rejected him. It shows us that this is still the case for us today. Parables are known as stories with a meaning, designed to teach a lesson, moral, ethical or spiritual. It is interesting that we sometimes encounter Jesus explaining them and other times letting them hang and the hearer left to try to work it out. In this reading we have an explanation of what Jesus was trying to get across to those he was teaching- all with amazing imagery that would have been familiar to the people of Jesus' time.

Andy adds: *The Annotated Jewish New Testament* notes that the word "parable" from the Greek *parabolē* means "comparison". Parables appear in various forms in Jewish literature and were ways of understanding theological ideas. Christians, like Jews, love study and interpretation of the Bible – we always have and Jewish people in Jesus' time were no different. Whilst Jews and Christians believed that the Bible was a sacred,

authoritative text it was also seen as cryptic where one had to think and wrestle with it to discern its meanings. There may be obvious plain meanings but also deeper ones beneath the surface of its words. Scholars debate the similarities and differences between Jesus' parables and more than 1,000 rabbinic parables that have been preserved. It is clear that neither Jesus, nor the rabbis, invented parables; they were a well-used and familiar literary device in the first century world and drew on an oral literature going back well into the OT times – think of how Nathan used a parable to condemn David for his rape of Bathsheba and murder of her husband. Whilst Christians and Jews came to disagree about the nature and mission of Jesus their use of parables was, remarkably similar. Ian Boxall (in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary for the 21st Century*) sees the point of today's parable as the extravagant wastefulness of the farmer's indiscriminate sowing – Jenny makes this point with her view the farmer would not be very good at beer pong! Perhaps this is a sign of God's 'wasteful' indiscriminate love? Then there's the extraordinary crop from those few seeds which are successfully planted. There's good preaching material there – many hear the word/seed, few respond - but the responses can be amazing. In the interpretation of the parable given in the second part of today's reading we might want to ponder on what the stoney ground might be; would Peter (the rock) and the other disciples who desert Jesus at his time of need be like the seeds sown on rocky ground; might the rich young man lured away from following Jesus by his riches be, in effect, choked by the weeds of wealth? We're left wondering who the Sower is – is it God, Jesus, missionaries, or ourselves? Perhaps the Sower could be a parable of all of those folk. Where are our seeds fruitful and where are they choked by the weeds? Where are we fruitful, where do we find ourselves choked? There's lots to play with in this rich reading.

Isaiah 55

If using the alternate choice for the Old Testament reading (Isaiah 55: 10-13) you have some fertile ground to plough. Look at my notes for last week to see read the context for Isaiah 55; today's reading is about God's word going forth using agricultural images "for as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater..." This makes it an ideal companion for the Gospel reading. The writer is sure God's words will prevail just as the natural order of things is for growth and development.

Psalms 65: 1-13

The Psalm set to echo the Isaiah passage is full of natural, and some agricultural images "the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain..." The poem is in three parts: God's mercy in the Temple, God's creative power and the gift of rain that nurtures the harvest. The poet shifts recognition from the focus on personal forgiveness to universal recognition of God. The effects of God's teaching are seen on the congregation, the world and for the land. We might want to ponder how human made climate change might want us to think if the natural order of things the Psalmist saw has rather changed due to our selfish greed.

Prayers of Intercession

Loving God, You have given us so much and loved us so completely, we come to give you thanks.

For family and friends, for roles and responsibilities, for opportunities and possibilities, for each day, and for things that inspire, amaze, dazzle, strengthen and uphold us. Thank you, God.

In this time of quiet, we give thanks.

Silence

God of hope, we live each day surrounded by your presence, your love, and your creation.

Even on our toughest days we are never alone.

As we live, we seek to be people who respond to your love through our thoughts, words, and actions.

Today we come aware of the abundance of your love,

But aware that in our world,

there are people in places who are living with desperation, conflict, sadness, prejudice, isolation, rejection, hunger, scarcity and poverty. Where each day is a struggle and the overflowing sense of hope is quashed

by uncertainty, doubt, pain, and a feeling of never ending.

We pray for the helpers, the light-bringers, the peacemakers,

the joy-finders, the solution-offerers, the difference-makers.

Loving God, help all those who make this world a better place.

Silence

We hold before you now the places around our world

where power corrupts,

where leaders behave badly,

where war is ongoing,

where discrimination is felt,

and where money and personal gain is prioritised over people.

Loving God, challenge those who make this world

a hard and difficult place to live in.

Silence

We think of all those known to us who are struggling with life.

For whatever reason. For those feeling betrayed, unloved, hopeless, overwhelmed, depressed, anxious, fearful, or sad.

Help us to find ways to talk, care, share, and show compassion.

We bring to you those who feel that life is hard
and we ask that they may find peace, possibility, and potential.
And may we find ways to be your voice,
hands and feet in your world.
Loving God, lift up the cast down and uphold the ground down.

Silence

And finally we pray for ourselves.
May we be like the sower,
scattering seeds of your love randomly and wildly.
Not confining our sharing to those we like or are the same as,
but with abandon and with generosity.
Hold us, help us and bless us as we live your way.
Each and every day.
Loving God, be with us.

Silence

All this we offer in the name of the wandering Galilean who turned the world upside
down with his radical ways. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Loving God,
we give thanks for all we have
and all we are
and all that is to come.
We give thanks for your love in our lives and for the blessings this brings.
In response we offer what we have to you:
our time, talents, energy, prayers, worship, and financial giving.
Receive our gifts given freely and with love.
Take them and us, help us to make a difference.
To be kingdom-bringers, hope- holders and peace-makers.
Each and every day. Amen.

Blessing

As receivers of God's abundant love, freely sown in our lives and our world,
may we find ways to share the blessings, joys, peace and hope we know,
this week and on into the future.

And may God Creator, Son and Spirit,
bless us, those we love and those we struggle to love,
as we strive to live God's way, now and forever, Amen.

Hymn Suggestions

	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Great God Your Love Has Called Us Here	339	484	499	
Now Thank We All Our God	72	182	81	486
10,000 Reasons				1259
God, How Can We Forgive?			613	
Isaiah the Prophet Has Written of Old		241		
The Reign of God Like Farmer's Field		343		
In our Lives Plant Seeds of Hope		349		
Change my heart O God				69
Jesus Calls Us O'er The Tumult*	355	509	250	359
Tell me the stories of Jesus				629
Come living God when least expected	354	609		
Jesus Shall Reign	269	470	328	379
At the Name of Jesus	261	458	317	41
I The Lord of Sea and Sky		251	663	857

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

*Refresh this hymn by using the American folk tune [Restoration](#)

Jenny also suggests *We Cannot Own The Sunlit Sky* which is number 2 in Common Ground and for which many American congregations use the Shaker Tune [How Can I Keep From Singing](#)