

# worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 26th July 2026  
Proper 12 | Ordinary 17  
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## Introduction

Scripture tells us that creation is not silent, but groans with longing and waits for hope. In our readings today, we meet Laban, who often approached relationships in a transactional way, and we meet Solomon, who asked God for a listening heart. Through Paul, we hear that the Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes for us when we do not know how to pray. Through Jesus, we learn that even a small act of love, like a mustard seed, can become a sign of God's healing and peace. As we begin worship, we ask a simple question. How can we walk gently on this earth and live as God's children who listen, who care, and who bring hope? May this time of worship open our hearts to the voice of creation and to the love of God who restores all things.

## Call to Worship

Beloved in Christ, we gather today mindful of God's creation,  
where every breath of wind and every living being  
reminds us of God's compassion and presence.

**We come remembering that  
we are part of God's creation and children of God.**

Let us set aside the burdens we carry.  
Open our hearts to the One who teaches us to listen  
to the quiet cry of the earth,  
to the longing of all creatures,  
and to the voice of the Spirit calling us into new life.

**We praise the God  
who helps us our faith to develop into hope.**

God of mercy and peace, you invite us to worship.  
With all creation, we lift our hearts to you.  
**Amen.**

## Prayers of Approach, Confession and Grace

Creator God,  
you breathe life into all that exists.  
The sky, the soil, the rivers, and every creature

bear witness to your goodness.  
We come before you in gratitude,  
seeking your presence and your peace.

Yet we confess that we have not always lived  
In harmony with your creation.  
We have hurried past the voices of creation.  
We have chosen convenience over compassion  
and have forgotten the deep connection  
we share with all that you have made.

Forgive us, gracious Lord.  
Heal the places where we have caused harm.  
Restore in us a listening heart,  
a heart that notices beauty, responds to suffering,  
and seeks the flourishing of every living being.

Pour out your renewing Spirit upon us,  
that we may walk gently on the earth,  
love generously,  
and join your work of healing and hope.

In Christ's name we pray.  
**Amen.**

## **A Declaration of Forgiveness**

Beloved in Christ, hear the good news.  
The One who created the heavens and the earth  
is the same One who renews our hearts.  
God's mercy is wider than the oceans  
and gentler than the morning light.

In Christ, we are forgiven.  
In Christ, we are made whole.  
In Christ, we are invited again  
to walk with creation in hope and harmony.

Receive this grace,  
and live as people restored by God's love.

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

## **Prayer for Illumination**

Spirit of God, open our hearts as we listen to your Word.  
Give us a listening heart,

so that we may discern your wisdom  
in Scripture, in creation, and in our daily lives.  
Guide us by your light  
through Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

## All Age Activity

### Seeds of Hope

Theme: Even the smallest acts of care can bring healing and beauty to God's creation.  
Materials: Tiny seeds (mustard seeds), clay or damp soil, small Ziploc bags

Procedure:

1. Observe: Hold a tiny seed in your hand. Notice how small it is. Remember Jesus' words that the Kingdom of Heaven is like this seed.
2. Create: Take a piece of clay or soil and gently press the seeds inside. Roll them into a ball to protect them. We call this ball a "Seed of Hope."
3. Commission: Take your Seed of Hope home. Find a patch of soil or a pot, place it gently inside, and wait for God to make it grow.

Reflection Questions:

- What do you imagine this tiny seed could become as it grows?
- What small act of care could you plant in the world today?
- If the earth could speak to us, what might it say?

## Readings

*Genesis 29:15-28 | 1 Kings 3:5-12 | Romans 8:26-39 | St Matthew 13:31-33*

## Sermon Notes

*Genesis 29:15–28*

This passage presents a household in which decisions are shaped by advantage rather than by genuine regard for the people involved. Laban appears welcoming at first, yet the narrative reveals that his choices are organised around his own interests. Laban's treatment of Jacob also reflects this pattern, as his decisions are guided less by kinship and more by advantage. Leah and Rachel stand at the centre of important events, but the text does not record their words. Their absence from the dialogue is significant. It demonstrates a situation in which individuals are affected by decisions while remaining unheard. In the sermon this passage illustrates a wider human pattern. People and the created world may endure harmful conditions without receiving adequate attention. The story shows how easily a community can accept arrangements that overlook the needs and experiences of others. The passage therefore identifies a spiritual condition in which the capacity to listen has diminished. It provides the initial framework for the themes that follow in the sermon.

### *1 Kings 3:5–12*

This passage presents Solomon at the beginning of his reign. He recognises the weight of his responsibility and acknowledges his own limitations. When God invites him to request what he desires, he asks for a listening heart. This request involves more than the physical act of hearing. It refers to the ability to recognise and interpret the realities that shape the lives of the people he leads. In the sermon this text introduces a corrective direction in contrast to the pattern observed in Genesis. Solomon does not seek personal gain or control. He asks for the ability to attend carefully to the needs and concerns of others. This shows that wise leadership is grounded in humility and in careful attention to other living beings. Solomon's prayer becomes the central theological reference point of the sermon, because it defines the quality of attentiveness that the sermon encourages.

### *Romans 8:26–39*

This passage acknowledges the limits of human understanding. Paul states that people do not always know how to pray and do not possess complete insight into their own experiences. The text presents this limitation without judgement. It shows that the Spirit of God remains present within human weakness. The Spirit intercedes in prayer and expresses what people are unable to articulate. In the sermon this passage provides reassurance. It reminds us that the practice of attentive listening does not rely solely on human effort. God sustains individuals when they face uncertainty or burdens. The strong declarations at the end of the passage affirm that nothing has the power to remove a person from the love of God in Christ. This assurance creates a stable foundation for the congregation. It enables them to recognise suffering and to practise attentive care without fear of being overwhelmed. Romans 8 prepares the way for the practical teaching that follows.

### *Matthew 13:31–33*

This passage describes how the kingdom of God emerges from a very small beginning. The mustard seed is small, yet it grows into a plant large enough to provide space for life. The process is gradual and not immediately visible. Jesus uses this image to show that God's work is often carried forward through actions that appear simple. In the sermon this parable guides the congregation towards concrete practice. It shows that the habits of a listening heart can be enacted in ordinary circumstances. Acts such as calm conversation, patient attention, forgiveness, or care for the created world are presented as meaningful contributions to the work of God. It moves the sermon from reflection toward everyday life.

### *Conclusion*

These four passages form a clear sequence within the sermon. Genesis depicts a context in which important voices are not heard. 1 Kings introduces the request for a listening heart and the posture needed to hear with care. Romans offers assurance that the Spirit works within human weakness. Matthew presents practical actions that express attentive living in daily settings. Together the passages establish a path from awareness of

neglected suffering to the growth of attentive listening and then to practices that reflect hope. The sermon uses these texts to encourage the congregation to relate to God, to other people, and to the created world with steady and thoughtful attention.

## Prayers of Intercession

Creator God, we hear the groaning of the earth.  
Forgive us for the ways we have taken more than we needed.  
Guide us back to our true calling to care for your creation with love.  
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the leaders of the nations.  
Turn their hearts from Laban's way of shaping relationships around advantage.  
Grant them Solomon's wisdom to listen with care  
and to choose what leads to life and dignity for all.  
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who suffer,  
for those affected by floods, fires, droughts, and every kind of loss.  
Be a shelter to those who have been displaced  
and open our eyes to see them as family.  
Move our hearts to offer compassion and help.  
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our church.  
Though we may feel small like a mustard seed,  
bless our daily acts of care and compassion.  
Help us to plant seeds of hope and peace  
in the lives of our neighbours.  
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of life, receive these prayers.  
Renew our spirits and renew the earth.  
We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

## Offertory Introduction and Prayer

God has given us gifts beyond measure:  
the warmth of the sun, the gift of rain, the beauty of the earth,  
and the grace that sustains our lives each day.  
In gratitude for all we have received,  
let us offer our gifts with thankful and willing hearts.

Generous God,  
from your hands we have received everything we have.  
Accept the gifts we bring today,  
signs of our gratitude and our desire to serve you.

Like small seeds, may they grow in your grace  
to bless our neighbours and to strengthen your church.  
In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

## Blessing

Go into the world with a listening heart.  
May the seeds of love you plant grow in God's grace.  
Walk gently upon the earth as God's beloved children.  
And remember, nothing can separate us from God's love.

And may the blessing of God Almighty,  
the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sustainer,  
be with you and with all creation,  
now and forever.

**Amen.**

Hymn Suggestions				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Touch the Earth Lightly		243	729	
God / Thou whose almighty word	38	112	106	699
Speak, O Lord, as we come to you			161	1350
Beauty for Brokenness [God of the poor]		259	693	806
For the Healing of the Nations	620	706	696	
Christ Be Our Light [Longing for light, we wait in darkness]		543	706	1201
There's A Wideness in God's Mercy	353	187	416	683
Seek Ye First	512	641	254	590
Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah	345	167	465	201
Love Divine, All Loves Excelling	663	519	503	449
The Spirit Lives to Set Us Free			397	664
We Sing A Love That Sets All People Free		622		

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