

worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 2nd August 2026
Proper 13 | Ordinary 18
The Revd Andy Braunton

Call to Worship

Come to the One who attends to our cries.

Give ear, O God, to our prayers for our lips are free of deceit.

If You try our hearts, O God, if You visit us by night, if You test us,
You will find no wickedness in us; our mouths do not transgress.

We have avoided the ways of the violent.

Our steps have held fast to Your paths; our feet have not slipped.

We call upon You, for You will answer us, O Maker;

incline Your ear to us; hear our words.

Wondrously show Your steadfast love, O Saviour

to those who seek refuge at Your right hand.

As for us, we shall behold Your face, O Spirit,

**when we awake we shall be satisfied, behold Your likeness,
and worship You in spirit and truth.**

Come, let us worship God!

Prayers of Approach, Confession & Grace

We come before You today, O Maker, knowing in You there is no injustice,

You are full of mercy and have abundant compassion,

and we bring our thanks and praise.

Your plans are inscrutable, Your love indiscriminate, Your purposes mysterious.

With the Psalmist, Lord Jesus,

we come to You wanting to believe in our own goodness and integrity.

But our lips are not always free of deceit, sometimes wickedness is found within us,
often our mouths, and our lives, transgress Your way.

We become, despite our best efforts, complicit with violence and terror,
as we slip and lose our footing in Your Word.

We hear the lies and hatred of our society, and are tempted to reject those in need,

those who have sought refuge, those who long for freedom.

Forgive us, good Lord, and give us time to change.

We call upon you, Most Holy Spirit, longing to behold Your face, knowing that Your steadfast love brings us home, that we can be forgiven and we can forgive – even ourselves.

So restore us to our rightful place, O God, remind us of Your loving kindness, and, as we wrestle with You and our world, satisfy our ancient hungers. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

Wrestle with us O God, as we tease out meaning and purpose in Your Word – ever ancient and ever new - that we may grow the will to respond, and the faith to believe in You, our source, goal, and guide. Amen.

Readings

Genesis 32:22-31 | Psalm 17 | Romans 9:1-18 | St Matthew 14:13-21

All Age Activity

The URC Children and Youth Team have this resource about Jacob and Esau reuniting. <https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Families-on-Faith-Adventures-Week-111-Turn-It-Off-And-On-Again-.pdf>

and this resource based on the account of the Feeding of the 5,000 in John's Gospel.

https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/1638/09/Families_on_Faith_Adventures_-_Week_20_-_What_do_You_Bring_.pdf

Sermon Notes

Genesis describes the prehistory of the Jewish people – from the beginning of the world to the divine election of Israel as the Chosen People. It is a collection of stories that have been gathered together to give an identity narrative to the Jewish people. It's not clear when these stories were written down – some scholars thinking some material as early as the 9th Century BCE with other material being written down around the time of the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BCE. Other parts of the book may date from after the return from the Babylonian exile in 538 BCE. It is thought that the work, as we know it today, took its final shape in those post exilic years. Today's passage is part of a wider story of dreadful family dynamics. Genesis 25:26 notes that Esau was born before Jacob

(who came out of the womb holding his brother's heel as if trying to pull him back). The name Jacob means "he grasps the heel" which might be a Hebrew idiom for deceptive behaviour. The struggle continues in life as, when grown up, Esau returns from work in the fields dreadfully hungry; Jacob offers him a bowl of stew (pottage in older English) in return for his birthright – the right to be recognised as first born. This birthright would give the right to lead the family and have the authority of the father. Esau's actions might be a sign that he did not deserve to be the leader – he was not steadfast. Jacob might be seen as cunning or might be seen to have greater intelligence. Jacob's actions were not illegal but were certainly not honourable. Later in the story Esau marries two local, Hittite, women against Abraham's (and God's) command not to do so. His marriages were "a source of bitterness" to his parents (26.35) In his old age Isaac told Esau to bring venison, prepare food, and then he would bless Esau – ie confer the status of inheritor and authority. Rebecca overheard and told Jacob to go, disguised with a fleece so his father would think he was his, hairier, brother. As a result, Isaac unwittingly blessed Jacob giving him status and authority. Not surprisingly Esau was furious and vowed to kill Jacob as soon as their father died. At Rebecca's urging Jacob fled abroad leaving behind the wealth of his father's livestock, land, and tents in Esau's hands. Impoverished Jacob takes refuge with his uncle, Laban, who makes him work for 7 years before being able to marry his daughter Rachel and then swapping Rachel for her sister Leah. They'd make this a soap opera but the plot would be seen as unbelievable! This all brings us to today's passage; Jacob and Esau are to finally meet again – Jacob is worried and he moves his family and possessions to safety and prepares to meet his brother dividing his retainers into two camps so that one can safeguard his family and flee if necessary. He doesn't at this point, know if his brother is still in a murderous rage. After today's passage there's a reconciliation but relations between them remain difficult. Today's passage, however, concerns the wrestling with an angel – which gives him his new name Israel. It's not clear at the start of the passage if the unnamed wrestler is Esau – it would be logical for Jacob and the reader to think it was given all that had gone before. Jacob is not successful in gaining the name of the wrestler – to know someone's name in Hebrew is to have power over that person – and the wrestling only stops when the wrestler wounds Jacob's hip. A new name is given it's a pun on the Hebrew for God changing the meaning from *God Strives* to *Striving With God (and others)*. Then, as mysteriously as the wrestler appears, he goes. You might wish to ponder on the struggles we face in life – those of our own making and those thrust upon us. Jacob is an unlikely hero, a cunning man who cheats and grasps, loses all, but does well for himself. Determined in his wrestling after truth, securing God's blessing holding as fast to God as he did to his brother's heel. What do we hold fast to? What do we wrestle with? When are we honourable and not so honourable? What are we prepared to risk for truth?

Each section of *Psalms 17* starts with a request. The poet declares his or her innocence from criminality and asks God to respond with justice. The poet wants enemies vanquished and, after unjust accusations wishes God's wise verdict. Wishing to be safe the poet takes refuge overnight in the Temple "under the shadow of your wings" and in the morning is acquitted at trial. Just as Jacob wrestled with God, so the Psalmist has wrestled with an unnamed adversary. Just as Jacob was tested by God, so the Psalmist

asks to be tested so he or she can be found righteous. Just as Jacob wrestled through the night, the Psalmist found sanctuary with God in the unsafe hours of darkness.

It's not clear, to me at least, why the Lectionary stops at v5 of this passage in *Romans* omitting the section which explicitly links to the Jacob and Esau story which is the setting to our first reading! The first 5 verses are a lament at Paul's anguish at what he saw as the plight of the Jews, his siblings and kindred, who have not accepted Jesus as the Messiah. Yet, as his argument develops Paul does not see Israel's plight as contrary to God's design. Paul sees this disagreement as seeking their own righteousness rather than God's and claims not to judge them (though one wonders if those who disagreed and first heard these words might have felt them rather judgy!). He is clear, though that God has not repudiated the Covenant with the Jewish people (v6-8). Paul does not dispute the ethnic descent of God's blessing but seems dispute the right to inherit – hence the shades of the inheritance disputes between Jacob and Esau. Mark D Nanos in the *Jewish Annotated New Testament* notes, of this passage: "Paul's response to questions continues with the matter of discrimination between the two offspring of Isaac's seed: only one of the two—Jacob, who becomes Israel—will be the select one through which the divine promise to Abraham would be kept. Thus, not only could such divine discrimination occur because of the children produced by two different spouses, such as in Abraham's case of children through Hagar and Sarah, but also in the case of one spouse, such as Isaac and Rebecca, who had twins. Moreover, it occurred in her womb, so that it cannot demonstrate anything except God's plan in action. This argument tells against reading Paul's language of foreknowledge or predestination to imply that God knows what different people will do, and thus decides the outcome in advance. Rather, here it is God's sovereign choice that is exalted, albeit about a particular matter, the promised seed, and it does not claim that either child could not behave righteously, whether chosen as the seed or not. The choice occurred before either could commit good or evil; by implication, before God knew how Jacob and Esau would behave. It is neither a punishment nor a reward, but God's own design at work." Here, Paul is wrestling with God's will, trying to make sense of the election of the Jewish people, the favouring of one Jew, Jacob, over another, Esau, and, by extension, what God's foreknowledge might mean in practice. Foreknowledge and predestination are ideas Synagogue and Church have wrestled with for millennia. Perhaps the most that can be said is that God's mysterious ways always surprise us!

In *Matthew* we have a striking contrast with the earlier verses of the chapter where Herod's birthday feast concludes with the head of the decapitated John the Baptist being served on a platter. Instead, Jesus shares a life-giving meal where many are included. The disciples are tired and suggest sending the crowd away but Jesus, the good shepherd, knows the sheep need to be fed. This is a rare episode in the life of Jesus in that all four Gospels include it. Like the Last Supper – which one sees echoes of here, it takes place at evening; it's more spectacular than the prophet Elijah's feeding of a hundred people with 20 loaves (2 Kgs 4: 42-44) and whilst we call this the feeding of the 5,000 that's only the men – the women and children would have multiplied this number hugely. There's also a resonance of the feeding of the Jewish people in the wilderness – as this takes place "in

a deserted place.” There’s symbolism in the details two – five loaves representing the five books of the Law, 12 baskets as the 12 tribes of Israel. Jesus assisted by the disciples is gathering together the lost sheep of Israel but the story looks forward to the Eucharist – Jesus took, blessed, broke and gave just as he does at the Last Supper. It culminates in the gathering of the leftovers – just as they did in Early Church communion services (see Didache 9: 3 – 4 “As this broken bread was once scattered on the mountains, and after it had been brought together became one, so may Your Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth unto Your kingdom...)

Weaving Threads We have much about wrestling in our first reading – wrestling brothers in a conflict-ridden family, and Jacob wrestling with God through the night. We have the unjustly accused Psalmist wrestling with injustice, longing to be tested by God to be proved righteous, and taking shelter in the Temple at night for safety. In Romans Paul used the Jacob and Esau story to wrestle with the mysterious foreknowledge and election by God of the Jewish people, even those who don’t accept Paul’s views on Jesus. In our Gospel the disciples wrestle with tiredness and logistics but Jesus, in a foretaste of the Eucharist, feeds a hungry people. We hunger now for so much – many in our world hunger physically food, shelter, and the basic necessities of life whilst the rich get ever more rich and ever more unwilling to pay their fair share of taxes. We hunger for peace in a world ever more set on war and conflict. We hunger for justice in a world where people are still executed for how they love or what they believe. We wrestle with the world as it is, even as we long for it to become what it could be. We wrestle with the purposes of God longing for the world to turn, for hopes to be fulfilled not dashed. As we hunger and wrestle, we are fed and satisfied every time we share Communion but we’re also given energy and inspiration to work for change, for the coming Kingdom.

Affirmation of Faith

We believe in God.

Despite God’s silence and secrets we believe that God lives.

Despite evil and suffering we believe that God made the world so that all would be happy in life.

Despite the limitations of our reason and the revolts of our hearts, we believe in God.

We believe in Jesus Christ.

Despite the centuries which separate us from the time when He came to earth, we believe in His word.

Despite our incomprehension and our doubt, we believe in His resurrection.

Despite his weakness and poverty, we believe in His reign.

We believe in the Holy Spirit.

Despite appearances we believe the Spirit guides the Church; despite death we believe in eternal life;

**despite ignorance and disbelief,
we believe that the Kingdom of God is promised to all. Amen.**

*From the Reformed Church of France
translated by Andy Braunston*

Intercessions

Hear us, O God, as we bring our prayers to You,
as we wrestle with the world as it is and hunger for it could be.

O Eternal Majesty,
so many in our world hunger for food, shelter, warmth
and the basic necessities of life,
yet the greed of our world continues
and the ultra-rich amass more and more resources to themselves
with an ever-increasing reluctance to share.
We pray for those who try to change the way things are,
who feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, and relieve the oppressed.
Yet as we pray for them, O God,
keep us dissatisfied that they are needed,
stop charity diverting us from the changes that must happen,
for we proclaim the world is about to turn as Your kingdom breaks in.

pause

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

O Enfleshed Word,
we hunger for peace in a world ever more set on war,
conflict, hatred and division.
We hunger for justice in an unfair world
where people are still executed for how they love or what they believe,
where elites choose to divide us, lest we unite and overthrow them.
We wrestle with the world as it is,
even as we long for it to become what it could be,
for we proclaim the world is about to turn as Your kingdom breaks in.

pause

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

O Fire of Love,
we wrestle with Your purposes
longing for the world to turn,
for hopes to be fulfilled not dashed,
yet are fearful we will lose our power and privilege.
As You feed us at pulpit and table,
give the energy and inspiration to work for change,

for we proclaim the world is about to turn as Your kingdom breaks in.

pause

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

Eternal Trinity of Love,

We bring to You now those known to us in any kind of need...

Inspire us to help, hold, love and learn.

We bring ourselves to You and our own needs and dreams...

Inspire us to help, hold, love, and learn.

Pause

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

We unite all our prayers with Christians throughout time and space as we pray as Jesus taught saying, Our Father...

Offering

Jacob desired more than he was given,

the Psalmist demanded better than life had dealt him,

Paul struggled with the reality of God's loving kindness,

and Jesus gave to meet the needs of a hungry crowd.

At Communion Jesus gives his very self to nurture our bodies and souls.

Giving is central to our faith;

giving of time, talent, treasure makes a difference to so many,

and so, at this point, we give thanks for all that is given in this church.

O God with whom we struggle,

bless our gifts of time, talent and treasure,

that through them the world's hungers may be met,

our selfishness countered,

and Your Kingdom come. Amen.

Holy Communion

Just as He did on the hillside with the multitude,

the Lord Jesus, at the Last Supper,

took bread, gave thanks, broke and shared it.

As Jesus fulfilled the hunger of the crowd that evening,

he now satisfies the hungers of humanity in this meal.

Jesus used the simple things of bread and fish to ease hunger,

and now uses the simple things of our lives to ease need.

Jesus invites all to His table

where the hungry are filled with good things,
where we are gathered up into the presence of the Most High,
where He, himself, risen and ascended, is present
and where gives Himself to us for our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.

So, we gather at this table and remember a meal shared long ago,
when Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke the bread
and gave it to his friends saying:

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

After supper Jesus took the cup filled with wine,
said the blessing, and gave the cup to his friends saying:

‘Take this all of you and drink from it, for this is the cup of my blood,
the blood of the new and everlasting covenant
which will be shed for you and for all for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this in memory of me.’

Let us remember Jesus as we recall the central mystery of our faith:

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

Come, Most Holy Spirit,
as we Your people, in obedience to the Lord’s command,
show forth His sacrifice on the Cross
through this broken bread and out poured wine.
Bless these simple gifts that they may be for us
the communion with the body and blood of Jesus Christ.
Unite us with Jesus and, through Him,
with the whole Church on earth and in heaven,
as we give our sacrifice of thanksgiving,
and renew the offering of ourselves, our lives, and our struggles.

Keep us joyful in the promise of Jesus’ coming again in glory,
for through Him, with Him, in Him,
all glory and honour belongs to the Most High,
in Your unity, O Holy Spirit, forever and ever, Amen.

Post Communion Prayer

We give thanks to You, O Most High,
for Your Holy Name which You tabernacle in our hearts,
and for the knowledge, faith, and immortality

which You make known to us through Jesus Christ.
To You be glory for ever!

You created all things for Your Name's sake,
and give food and drink for our enjoyment,
that we might give You thanks,
but You also bless us with spiritual food and drink
and eternal light through Jesus Christ.
To You be glory for ever!

Remember, Most Holy Spirit, Your Church,
deliver it from all evil and perfect it in Your love,
gather it together in holiness from the four winds
to Your kingdom which You prepared for it.
To You be glory for ever!
Amen

from the Didache

Blessing

May the One who satisfies your hungers,
the One offers His own life for peace,
and the One who inspires us to dream
 of what the coming Kingdom might be like
make you yearn for all to be filled with good things,
make you work for peace,
and inspire your dreams,
and may the blessing of Almighty God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit **or** Eternal Majesty, Enfleshed Word, Eternal Flame
be with you all, now and always, Amen.

Hymn Suggestions

	RS	CH4	StF	MP
New Every Morning Is The Love	536	214	137	480
Every New Morning (sing to Bunessan)		213		
10,000 Reasons (Bless the Lord)				1259
For Everyone Born A Place At the Table		685		
Here In This Place / Gather Us In		623		
Come O Thou Traveller Unknown			461	
An Upper Room Did Our Lord Prepare	438		569	
Let Us Break Bread Together	452		592	414
When The Hungry Who Have Nothing / Cuando el Pobre		258		
By Faith We See The Hand Of God				1262
The God of Abram Praise (if not using it's rewrite below)	121	162	91	645
Here O My Lord I See Thee Face to Face		664		230
Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness		348		
All My Hope On God Is Founded	586	192	455	16

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

My hymn choices today might be more niche than usual and aren't in all our books. *The God of Sarah Praise* is a wonderful reworking of the God of Abram Praise and can be found online or in the Church of Scotland's new hymnal supplement, *God Welcomes All* at No 25. You might like to have Charles Wesley's *Come O Thou Traveller Unknown* using some of the [verses](#) and Maddy Prior's [brilliant version](#) to either sing to or have to listen to after the Genesis reading. *My Soul Cries Out With A Joyful Shout / The Canticle of the Turning* is a reworking of the Magnificat and set to the Irish tune The Star of County Down. It's great fun, easy to sing and [find online](#).