

# worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> August 2026  
Proper 15 | Ordinary 20  
The Revd Dr Susan Durber

## Call to Worship

Come, people of God, whoever you are.  
Come, regulars or visitors, convinced or wondering.  
Join in the fellowship of the world-wide Church;  
Share in the communion of all the saints in heaven.  
For God is good, and God's love is everlasting.

## Prayers of Approach and Confession

Let us be silent and know that God is here...

Let us be silent and offer our praise to Christ...

Let us be silent and call on the Holy Spirit...

God, who knows and sees each one,  
who forms us daily from your love,  
we take a moment within our worship  
to imagine what you see in our hearts and lives.

We remember how Jesus hated hypocrisy,  
how he called out those dishonest with themselves.  
We recall his words about letting go of possessions,  
his command to love even our enemies.  
And we know ourselves judged.

But we know that we are judged by Jesus,  
the one who brought a gospel of forgiveness,  
of outrageous and unconditional love,  
of healing, renewal and resurrection.  
Our deepest shame is tempered by his mercy.  
The open wounds of our gravest guilt can be healed.  
The daily failures of every human life are not eternal.

So, God of mercy,  
let judgement not condemn but improve us.

May we grow into the humanity we see in Jesus,  
wounded and risen, yet each day marked by mercy and joy. Amen.

## Words of Forgiveness

Praise be to the God of all grace,  
who, in Jesus, preached forgiveness  
and whose Holy Spirit comes to renew us.  
You are forgiven. We are forgiven.  
Thanks be to God.

## Prayer for Illumination

God, we may have heard these readings before,  
and think we know what they say.  
Our attention is not always full  
and we are distracted by many things.  
Give us ears to hear the readings,  
as though for the first time,  
and so to hear your Word for us today, Amen.

## Readings

*Isaiah 56:1, 6-8 | Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32 | Matthew 15: (10-20), 21-28*

## All-Age Activity

In how many languages can those gathered in your congregation say (for example) 'Thank you'? See how many you can find! Some people may well have more than one language...The Christian faith is unusual amongst the faiths of the world in not having a special 'holy' language. You could say that all languages are holy, all peoples, and all lands. Jesus is 'a light to the nations'. The Church is not English, Welsh, or anything else alone and does not belong to any nation. Jesus is light for the world.

## Sermon Notes

*Isaiah* This passage shows us that long before the time of Jesus there were faithful Jews who believed that the Temple should be a place of prayer for everyone, that no-one should be excluded. In the Hebrew scriptures you can read a range of views about this. The book of Ruth, for example, was written partly at least to justify the place of a foreigner (Ruth the Moabite) in the story of God's people, while other books (like Ezra and Nehemiah) were keener that the people should not marry foreigners (having returned from exile and slavery in a foreign land). This passage from Isaiah is one that Jesus later quoted as he turned over the tables in the Temple, showing that he believed,

with the prophet, that it should be there for all people, and that God would gather 'others'.

*Romans* In this passage, Paul responds to those among the churches who were (it seems) arguing that the special favour of God had now fallen on the followers of Jesus, but had been withdrawn from the Jewish people. No! says Paul. By no means. The gifts of God are irrevocable, and God's mercy is for all. The covenant has, in a sense, been opened up now to include the Gentiles (but not then to exclude the Jews!).

*Matthew* It is truly amazing that this story was included in the Gospel at all, especially perhaps in Matthew, since Matthew is so determined to tell us that Jesus wasn't baptised because of his sin! Those who want to ask which passages from the gospels actually happened would put this high on the list because no-one would have invented it. Jesus engages in a public argument with a woman, a foreigner, and even changes his mind because of what she says. At first, he doesn't even answer her, and then he argues that he was only sent to his own people, and that it wouldn't be fair to give the children's food to the dogs. She argues, rather cleverly, with him and he concedes and heals her daughter. He doesn't actually say, in this passage, 'Yes you are right', but from this point his mission is changed and his community becomes more open, until, at the end of this Gospel, he tells the disciples to make disciples of all nations (with an echo, perhaps, of the prophet Isaiah). This is an extraordinary passage, pivotal for the story of Jesus, and vital for most of us in Christian churches who are not Jewish. Jesus was fully human, and to be human is to expand your horizons, to change your mind, to think differently sometimes.

*Weaving the Threads* We can celebrate that all of these passages speak of the broad reach of God's love, revealed in Christ. We can take them as lessons too that we should keep broadening our own.

## Affirmation of Faith

*The Nicene statement of faith is the one that is honoured, said, and prayed by the widest number of Christians around the world today. Its origins go back to the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE. Originally written in Greek, it is said and sung today in many different languages all over the world. And it has been so since the 4th century. It reminds us of our shared faith across time and around the globe.*

We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
born of the Father before all ages.

God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
of one being with the Father;  
through him all things were made.  
For us and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven,  
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,  
and became truly human.  
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,  
he suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day he rose again  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory  
to judge the living and the dead  
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father,  
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.  
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

*The Nicene Creed (R&S 760)*

## **Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

Thank you God, that your heart is so big,  
so full of love and mercy.  
Thank you that we are all welcome in your world,  
and never excluded from your embrace.

Fill us all with hope for better, kinder times,  
when in our families and communities all will find acceptance, joy and love.

We pray for those close to us,  
in our family and among our friends  
who we know are struggling with illness or anxiety  
with worries about money or the future,  
or with broken relationships...

We entrust them to your embrace.

We pray for the communities in which we live,  
for an end to division, prejudice and resentment.  
Wherever people speak threats or encourage hatred,  
let there be voices that speak welcome,  
and offer hope for a shared and joyful future,  
where all can live without fear  
and neighbours live together in peace.

We pray for the nations and peoples of this world.  
Where now we see war and invasion,  
bombs falling on civilians,  
populations driven out or killed,  
may there be peace.  
Where now refugees live in tents  
amid the ruins of homes,  
may there be rebuilding.  
Where children now hunger and sicken,  
may there be food and care.  
we long for a world where everyone  
can sleep peacefully and unafraid,  
where all may receive more than crumbs from the rich,  
but dignity, rights and fullness of life.

O God, who loves us all,  
every child, every adult, every creature,  
show us how to share this world  
with joyful, peaceful, generosity.  
Give us loving hearts and open minds,  
that the world may be different  
and the future filled with hope.

We make these prayers  
through the name of Jesus,  
and in the power of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

## Offering

We bring our offerings of money,  
as symbols of the offering of our lives  
and of our commitment to following Christ.

Into your hands, O God,  
we place all that we are and all that we have.

We offer to you the worship and service  
of this church and these people.  
We give our whole life long in your service  
so that all people may one day rejoice  
in the Kingdom of God. Amen.

## Blessing

May God, our Creator, bless you.  
May Christ, our Saviour, inspire you.  
May the Holy Spirit comfort you.  
this day and always, Amen.

Hymn Suggestions				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Through North and South and East and West	24			
For Everyone Born A Place At The Table		685		
There's a spirit in the air	329	616	398	
The great love of God	105	358		
Gloria, Gloria in excelsis deo (or in English) Try singing it as a round	7	760	752	
He came down		359		
There's a wideness in God's mercy	353	187	416	683
We are marching in the light of God (sing it in both languages)	555	516	483	954
Jesus Christ is waiting		360	251	
When Jesus the healer		350		
Love inspired the anger			253	
Would you walk by on the side?			257	
Day by day, dear Lord	491		444	
In Christ there is no East or West	647	624	685	329

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

You might also want to use [Silence! Frenzied, unclean spirit](#) which can be sung to Ebenezer (Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing) and was written to fill the gap of songs which speak about Jesus casting out demons as in this reading.