

worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 14th June
Proper 6 | Ordinary 11
The Revd Jonnie Hill

Call to Worship

We come to worship like Abraham,
unsure how, or in whom, we will encounter God.

We come tired, hopeful, distracted,
learning to slow down,
to notice what is here,
how to wait, how to receive.

Whatever we are carrying, heavy or light,
let us give of what we have, trusting that God will not pass us by.

Prayers of Approach, Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness

God who meets us where we are,
in holy spaces and ordinary places,
in the stillness of this present moment.

Open our awareness, settle our bodies, quieten our minds,
to notice your loving presence.

Remind us that there is nothing we need to prove,
nothing we need to do, no one else we need to be.

May we rest in who we are,
and trust that we are already known,
already welcomed, already held.

pause

And yet, loving God, even as we say these words
we notice how easily they slip away.

We confess how hard it is to stop striving,
how quickly we return to doing and proving,

trying to be more than we are, rather than trusting.

pause

God's love does not slip away,
it does not depend on doing or proving, or even our ability to trust.

Hear good news.

We are met, again, and again, with an exquisite grace,
and love which holds, heals and restores.

Thanks be to God, Amen.

All Age Activity

Note: When it comes to the time in the service to introduce the theme, I've sometimes addressed the congregation quite seriously and tell them that I love something that most children love but that most adults hate. And after a couple of moments of silence (for effect), I announce "audience participation". There's often been an audible groan, but I find it a helpful way of warming people up to get ready to volunteer.

Two ways of seeing (quick drama)

Act out a very short scene twice with a child or a willing adult

Scenario: Someone drops their bag and papers spill out everywhere

Version 1:

Another person walks past and mutters "what a mess, should have been more careful"

Version 2:

Another person stops, kneels down and helps to pick up the papers.

Ask: What was different? What changed? Which one looked more like Jesus?

Link it to the reading "when Jesus saw the crowd, he had compassion on them".

Prayer for Illumination

God, as we listen,
help us to tune in to all that gives life.
Speak into our hearts and minds,
your Word that frees us.
Amen.

Reading

St Matthew 9:35-10:8

Sermon Notes

Up to this point in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus has been the primary agent of teaching, healing and proclaiming, and so this passage signifies a major turning point in the narrative. Now Jesus' ministry is being extended and shared among the disciples. Matthew tells us that this opening up of mission happens after Jesus is moved with compassion by the crowds. It seems that this sequence of events is important, that seeing leads to compassion, which calls for action and sending out. Mission therefore is motivated by a deep embodied response to human need.

The English rendering of Jesus having compassion in v. 36 does little to communicate the richness of the original Greek. A more literal translation might say Jesus was moved to his inmost parts. I wonder, have you ever been so moved by another's suffering that it's felt like a sucker punch to the gut? I suspect that this is more in line with what the original Greek is communicating, a visceral, embodied response. This is not pity from a safe distance, but a messy, entangled connection to these peoples' suffering.

The crowds are described as 'harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd'. This language seems to echo some Old Testament critiques of poor leadership like in Ezekiel 34. Here, Jesus does not respond with condemnation or critique but with compassion and care.

A sermon might explore compassion as attention, the challenge of truly seeing people as they are and the powerful driver for change that compassion can become. It might deal with contemporary themes like welcoming the stranger or including the outsider. You might consider exploring the idea of compassion as costly, for Jesus as it can be for us. How hard is it to stand against the powers which seek to exclude and demonise? My own sermon approach was to consider compassion as a kind of antidote to blame and dehumanisation, a refusal to fall into the trap of seeing suffering as somehow akin to moral failure.

Modern readers of this passage may struggle with some of the language around curing disease and casting out demons. It's important to emphasise that in the first century context, illness was rarely thought of as simply physical but also as a sign of sin, shame or divine disapproval. Those affected were often excluded from family, worship and community life and so healing for them went way beyond the physical and included social and relational restoration. To heal therefore is to restore one's dignity and place within the community. A sermon might explore what such healing looks like in today's world.

This passage presents mission as rooted in seeing clearly, being moved deeply and acting restoratively. Such a reading invites sermons that resist blame, honour vulnerability and

imagine healing as the renewal of corporate life. In a world that is all too quick to apportion blame, explain suffering or draw lines between the deserving and undeserving, this passage invites the church to practise a different way of seeing, one that is shaped by compassion rather than judgement, by restoration rather than exclusion.

Dedication of the Offering

We give because it's good for us;
we give of our time, our talents, and our treasure.
We give in so many little ways and, sometimes, in big ways.
We give not in order to boast
but that through our giving we can make a difference,
embody God's love, and help change the world.
So let us give thanks for all the gifts given in this place.

Andy Braunston

Generous God,
we offer these gifts,
an expression of our care and compassion.
And we trust, that in your hands,
they will be used to bring healing and wholeness,
to a world in need. Amen.

Affirmation of Faith

We believe in God,
whose love is the source of all life
and the desire of our lives;
whose love was given a human face
in Jesus of Nazareth;
whose love was crucified
by the evil that waits to enslave us all;
and, whose love,
defeating even death,
is our glorious promise of freedom.

Therefore,
though we are sometimes fearful
and full of doubt,
we trust that love.

And in the name of Jesus Christ,
we commit ourselves
in the service of others:
to seek justice
and to live in peace;

to care for the earth
and to share the commonwealth of God's goodness;
to live in the freedom of forgiveness
and in the power of the Spirit of Love;
and in the company of all the faithful –
past, present, and yet to come –
so to be the Church,
for the glory of God. Amen.

from the Progressive Christian Alliance

Prayers of Intercession

Christ who was moved with compassion,
you noticed the crowds,
harassed, weary and searching for rest.
We bring before you now,
the needs of the world you love.

We pray for all who are worn down by life's adversities,
for those living with illness or pain,
for all struggling with stress or burnout,
and for people carrying grief and loss.
May each one be met with loving care,
understanding and kindness.

We pray for all who live on the margins of society,
for those who are excluded or judged,
for all pushed to the edge through situation or circumstance,
for people reduced to labels and hollow stereotypes.
Where blame has spread like contagion,
may dignity and humanity take root instead.

We pray for all who work to heal and restore,
for doctors and nurses, carers and counsellors,
for charity workers and volunteers,
for all who quietly hold so much behind the scenes.
Give strength for long days, patience when change is slow,
and rest for weary bodies and hearts.

And we pray for ourselves and your church,
sent out not with all the answers,
but with the call to notice,
to be moved with compassion,
and to act with care.

Help us to offer peace where we can,

to tread lightly and lovingly,
to trust the Spirit at work within us.

We place these prayers into your care,
trusting your compassion to hold
what we cannot fix or carry alone. Amen.

Blessing

May we leave this time and space,
knowing ourselves loved and affirmed.

May we, like Christ, be moved by compassion,
offering gentleness to others and to ourselves.

May the creative Spirit, living within each of us,
inspire the lives we now return to.

And the blessing of God,
Creator, Christ and Comforter,
be with you and all whom you love, this day and always. Amen.

Hymn Suggestions				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
God is love, let heaven adore him	95	123	103	187
Come Down O Love Divine	294	489	372	89
All My Hope On God Is Founded	586	192	455	16
Longing for light, we wait in darkness		543		
Loving Spirit, loving Spirit		597	706	1201
O Lord all the world belongs to you	90			
God of grace and God of glory	344		682	
There's a wideness in God's mercy	353	187	416	683
Will you come and follow me	558	583	673	
For the healing of the nations	620	706	696	
The Church of Christ, in every age	636		415	
Have you heard God's voice? / Disciples of Tomorrow			662	
Sacred the body God has created			618	
I the Lord of sea and sky		251	663	857
Go in grace and make disciples		682		
God of justice			699	1174
Hear the Call of the Kingdom			407	1282
As A Fire Is Meant For Burning		252		
Thuma mina / Send me Jesus		800	782	