

worship notes

from the United Reformed Church



Sunday 11th October 2026

Proper 23 | Ordinary 28

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Call to Worship

Come, you who are weary and you who are wondering.

We come seeking the peace of God.

Come, you who are joyful and you who are struggling to find joy.

We come seeking the peace of God.

Come, you who are certain and you who are full of questions.

We come seeking the peace of God -

the peace that surpasses all understanding,

the peace that guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice.

Let us worship God.

Prayers of Approach and Confession

God of peace,

we come to you because you are where peace begins.

Not the peace of denial or distraction,

not the peace of pretending everything is fine,

but the peace that comes from honesty -

from naming what is broken and trusting you to meet us there.

We approach you with thanksgiving for this day,

for the breath in our lungs,

for the community that gathers us,

for the scripture that shapes us,

and for the love that never lets us go.

And yet we confess, God of peace,

that we do not always live as people of peace.

We are quick to speak and slow to listen.

We nurse grievances and let kindness go cold.

We worry about things we cannot control
and neglect the things we can.
We know what is good and right and true,
and still we choose otherwise -
sharp words, impatient hearts,
minds that race toward the worst rather than the best.

Forgive us for the gap between what we believe
and how we actually live.
Forgive us for the times we have extended anything but peace
to the people closest to us -
in our homes, in our workplaces, in our churches,
in the comments we type and the conversations we avoid.

Silence is kept.

God of peace,
we bring you our whole selves -
our hopes and our failures,
our faith and our doubt,
our willingness and our resistance -
and we ask you to do what you always do:
meet us with grace,
and make us new. Amen.

Declaration of Forgiveness

Hear the good news: the God of peace does not hold our brokenness against us.
In Christ, God has made peace with us -
not because we earned it,
but because love does what love does.
And so, to all who turn, to all who stumble,
to all who try again:

God's peace is with you.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

Let us pray: Holy God,
we come to your word not as experts but as seekers -
people who need to hear something true,
something that cuts through the noise of our days
and lands in the soil of our lives.

Open this scripture to us.
Open us to this scripture.
May the reading and the preaching alike become for us
not just information but transformation -
not just words about you, but an encounter with you.

By your Spirit, make us hearers and doers.
By your Spirit, make us people who think on what is good
and then actually practice it.
Amen.

Reading

Philippians 4:1-9

All Age Activity

“Whatever Is True” Jar

You will need

- A jar or box (decorate it if you like - write "Whatever Is True" on the outside)
- Small slips of paper
- Pens or pencils

Before the service or during a designated time, invite everyone - children, adults, all ages -
to think about Paul's list in Philippians 4:8:

Whatever is TRUE
Whatever is HONOURABLE
Whatever is JUST
Whatever is PURE
Whatever is PLEASING (or LOVELY)
Whatever is COMMENDABLE
Anything worthy of PRAISE

Ask people to write down (or draw) one thing that fits one of those categories. It could be:

- Something true: "My gran loves me" or "The sun came up this morning"
- Something lovely: a drawing of a flower, or a pet's name
- Something just: "When my friend shared their lunch with someone who was hungry"
- Something worthy of praise: "My teacher who never gives up on us"

Fold the slips and put them in the jar.

During the week, when someone is feeling worried or sad, they can pull out a slip from the jar and read it. It is a way of practising what Paul says: "think about these things."

For younger children

You can simplify the categories. Ask: "What is something good that happened this week?" or "What is something beautiful you have seen?" Have them draw it on the paper and put it in the jar.

For older children and adults

Ask: "Which of these categories is hardest for you to think about right now? Which one comes easily?" This can open up a conversation about where our minds naturally go and how Paul is inviting us to train them differently.

Closing connection

Paul says "think about these things" and then "practice these things." The jar helps us think. But we also need to practice. So, the challenge is: take one thing from the jar this week and do something with it. If someone wrote "kindness," practice kindness. If someone wrote "my friend helped me," go help someone else. Thinking and doing go together - that is Paul's point.

Sermon Notes

Context

Paul is writing from prison - likely in Rome or Ephesus, around 60-62 CE - to the church he founded in Philippi (Acts 16). The letter to the Philippians is sometimes called the "letter of joy" because the word "rejoice" or "joy" appears more than a dozen times, despite Paul being in chains. This final chapter is deeply personal: Paul names specific people, gives

practical pastoral advice, and offers what amounts to a benediction that has been read in churches ever since.

Key Themes for Preaching

1. Euodia and Syntyche (verses 2-3)

Paul names two women leaders in the Philippian church who are in disagreement, and he asks his "loyal companion" to help them. This is remarkable: Paul does not take sides, does not lecture, does not shame. He simply asks for help, and he honours these women as co-workers "whose names are in the book of life." This is a model of conflict resolution in the church that is worth exploring. How do we handle disagreement? Do we name it honestly, or pretend it does not exist? Do we honour those who disagree with us as fellow workers, or do we demonise them?

2. "Rejoice in the Lord always" (verse 4)

This is one of the most quoted verses in the New Testament, and one of the most misunderstood. Paul is not commanding a feeling; he is commending a practice. "Rejoice" here is not "be happy" - it is closer to "orient your life toward the source of joy, which is God, regardless of circumstances." The repetition - "again I will say, Rejoice" - suggests this is not natural or easy. It is a discipline.

3. "Let your gentleness be known to everyone" (verse 5)

The Greek word here (epieikes) is notoriously difficult to translate. It means something like "reasonableness," "forbearance," "the quality of not insisting on one's rights." It is the opposite of self-assertion. In a culture that rewards aggression and loudness, this is a counter-cultural virtue. The Lord is near - and so the standard is not what the culture rewards, but what the Lord requires.

4. "Do not worry about anything" (verse 6)

Again, this is not a command to feel something, but to do something: to bring everything to God in prayer, "with thanksgiving." The antidote to anxiety is not denial but prayer - specifically, prayer that includes gratitude. The promise is that "the peace of God" (not just peace of mind, but God's own peace) will "guard" - the word is military, like a garrison - our hearts and minds.

5. *The Two Lists (verses 8-9)*

Paul gives two lists of virtues and issues two commands: "think about these things" and "practice these things." The first list is about what is true, honourable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise. The second list refers to what the Philippians have "learned and received and heard and seen" in Paul. The point is that right thinking and right acting go together. You cannot just think good thoughts; you must also do good things. And you cannot do good things without training your mind on what is good. This passage has a liturgical, almost creedal quality. Some scholars believe verses 8-9 may reflect an early Christian hymn or catechetical formula. The cadence is deliberate - it is meant to be heard, memorised, repeated.

6. *"The God of peace will be with you" (verse 9)*

The promise at the end is not just peace, but the God of peace. Paul does not promise that thinking and practicing good things will make life easy. He promises that God will be present. And this is written from prison.

Possible Angles for a Sermon

- The gap between what we believe and how we live, and the practices (like Passing the Peace) that help bridge it
- What it means to "rejoice" not as a feeling but as a discipline, especially in hard times
- Gentleness as a counter-cultural virtue in a world that rewards aggression
- The two lists as a pattern for daily life: what we think about shapes what we do
- Paul in prison as a model of hope - the context makes the content more powerful, not less
- Euodia and Syntyche as a model for handling disagreement in the church

Affirmation of Faith

Let us affirm our faith together:

We believe in God,
the God of peace,
who creates and sustains all that is,
who is near to us in every moment,
and whose peace surpasses all understanding.

We believe in Jesus Christ,
who extended his life to the point of death

to make peace with humanity,
who calls us to be peacemakers,
and who shows us what gentleness looks like
when the world rewards power.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,
who trains our hearts and hands and tongues
in the ways of peace,
who helps us think on what is true and honourable and just,
and who empowers us to practice what we profess.

We believe that the kin-dom of God
is already here and still drawing near,
and that we are called to usher it in -
not with fear, but with joy,
not with anxiety, but with prayer,
not with clenched fists, but with open hands.

We will rejoice. We will practice gentleness.
We will think on what is good. And we will do it.
The God of peace will be with us. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray for the world and for the church: God of peace,
we pray for the world you love -
every corner of it, every creature in it,
every community that is struggling under the weight of conflict, poverty, flood, fire, or war.

We pray for places where peace feels impossible:
where bombs have replaced bread,
where walls have replaced welcome,
where fear has replaced the difficult work of talking to one another.

We pray for leaders and decision-makers:
give them the courage to choose gentleness over aggression,
diplomacy over destruction,
and the long, patient work of peace over the short, loud work of pride.

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

We pray for the Church -
your Church in all its forms,
in this denomination and beyond it,
in buildings and in living rooms,
in places where ministers serve and in places where elders lead.

We pray for congregations that are tired,
for churches that are discerning their future,
for communities that are learning to disagree well,
and for those who are discovering what it means
to be the church in a new and uncertain time.

We pray for the United Reformed Church:
for its ministers, its elders, its members,
for those who lead worship, and for those who receive it.
May we be people who think on what is good
and then actually practice it.

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

We pray for our communities -
for schools and hospitals,
for shops and factories,
for those who work and those who cannot,
for those who are searching for a home
and for those who have made a home and are fighting to keep it.

We pray for the lonely,
for the anxious,
for those whose minds will not stop racing,
for those for whom "do not worry about anything"
feels less like a command and more like a cruel joke.

May your peace - the kind that does not make sense,
the kind that surpasses understanding -
guard their hearts and minds this week.

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

We pray for those we love and those we struggle to love.
For the people closest to us, who see us at our best and our worst,

and who deserve our gentleness more than they sometimes receive it.

For those who are grieving,
for those who are ill,
for those who are caring for others,
for those who are dying,
and for those who have died.

We name them now, in the silence of our hearts...

Silence is kept.

God of peace,
you who are near to us in every moment,
take our prayers and our worries,
our hopes and our helplessness,
and make of them something true, something honourable,
something just, something pure, something lovely,
something commendable, something excellent,
something worthy of praise.

We ask it in the name of Christ,
who is our peace. **Amen.**

Offertory

In Paul's letter to the Philippians, he thanks the church for their gifts - not just because the gifts met a need, but because they were evidence of a community that had learned to practice what it professed. Our giving is the same. It is one of the ways we practice what we believe - that everything we have is gift, and that sharing it is how the kin-dom works.

Let us pray:

God of all generosity,
we bring you what we have -
our money, our time, our gifts, our very selves.
Some of us bring a little, some a lot.
What matters is not the size of the gift
but the spirit in which it is given.

Take these offerings and use them

for purposes that are true and honourable and just -
for the work of your Church,
for the care of your people,
for the mending of your world.

May our giving be one more way
that we practice what we profess.
Amen.

Blessing

Be glad in the Lord always.
Focus your thoughts on all that is true,
all that is holy, all that is just,
all that is pure, all that is lovely,
and all that is worthy of praise.

And the peace of God -
peace that goes far beyond anything we can comprehend -
that peace will guard your hearts and minds
as you live in Christ Jesus.

So go from here with confidence and joy,
to serve the Lord
and to extend peace to all you meet.
And the God of peace will be with you.
Amen.

Hymn Suggestions				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Rejoice, the Lord is King	657	449	335	575
Make me a channel of your peace (Prayer of St Francis)	629	528	707	456
Put peace into each other's hands	635	659	712	
May the mind of Christ my Saviour		536	504	463
When peace like a river (It Is Well With My Soul)				757
Now thank we all our God	72	182	81	486
For the beauty of the earth	41	181	102	
What a friend we have in Jesus	413	547	531	746
Saviour, again to your dear name we raise	640	221		584

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