

They Broke Through the Roof

A Service for Black
History Month 2026



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***Black History Month 2026 celebrates the theme
“Honouring Our Communities”.***

In the spirit of this theme, the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson — who made history when she was inducted as the first Black woman, and only the second Black person, to serve as Moderator of the United Reformed Church General Assembly in 2023 — has written this service for churches who would like to hold a Black History Month-themed service in October and beyond.

Service

Musical prelude

Welcome & Call to worship

Gathering hymn: Come All You People (Uyai Mose) — a gathering song from Zimbabwe.

Prayer of Approach and the Lord's Prayer

Hymn: *The Right Hand of God* — a Caribbean ecumenical hymn by Patrick Prescod, with music by Noel Dexter.

Notices

Offering and dedication (with music)

All-age activity — 'The Communities Around Us'

Hymn: *The Love of God is Broad like Beach and Meadow* by Fred Kaan

Scripture readings: Psalm 133 and Mark 2:1–12

Hymn: *In Christ There is no East or West* by John Oxenham

Sermon: They Broke Through the Roof

Hymn: *For Everyone Born, a Place at the Table* by Shirley Erena Murray

Prayers of intercession (Responsive)

Act of commitment (optional)

Hymn: *We are Marching in the Light of God* (Siyahamba), or another sending song from the world Church.

Blessing and the Grace

Continuing the commitment

A Service for Black History Month 2026: Honouring Our Communities

Full service

Musical prelude

Music may be offered by local musicians, a choir or a recording used with permission. Allow the music to establish a spirit of welcome and attentive expectation.

Welcome

Welcome to this Black History Month service. Across Britain, churches and communities are marking the national theme, “Honouring Our Communities”. Each of us comes carrying communities that formed us, communities that welcomed us, communities that struggled for us and communities we still long to see. God receives the truth of every story.

In that grace, let us worship.

Call to worship (responsive)

We come with the names of those who raised us and the memory of those who forged a way forward.

All: We honour their courage and give thanks for their lives.

We come with stories of migration and settlement, resistance and faith, grief and joy.

All: We bring our whole history into the presence of God.

We come as people called by Jesus to break open new ways, cross boundaries and create room.

All: God of life, make us a community of courage.

Gathering hymn: Come, All You People (Uyai Mose)

Sing first in Shona where this can be led confidently, followed by an authorised English version.

Repetition allows the congregation to learn by listening.

Prayer of Approach followed by the Lord's Prayer

God of our ancestors and God of generations still to come,
you meet us within human history.

You hear the songs carried across seas.

You receive the prayers whispered in homes, fields, factories, classrooms, hospitals, detention centres and sanctuaries.

You have been present wherever people guarded one another's dignity and made life possible under pressure.

Today we give thanks for Black communities whose faith, courage, knowledge, creativity, organising and care have shaped our common life.

We remember those whose names were preserved and those whose names were lost through brutal displacement and violent enslavement.

Eternal God, we listen for you among histories that still shape the present,
and we offer ourselves to the work of justice, repair and life together.

Gather us now by your Spirit.
Sharpen our memory; deepen our listening; and enlarge our courage.
Where celebration rises, receive our joy.
Where grief remains, hold us tenderly.
Where injustice persists, disturb our comfort and direct our action.

Form among us a community in which truth is spoken,
wounds are tended,
power is shared
and every person is received as bearing your image.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ,
bringer of good news to the poor and freedom to the oppressed,
who taught us to say:

All: The Lord's Prayer (in whatever language or version that feels comfortable)

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever ~ Amen.

Hymn: *The Right Hand of God*

Notices

Offering and dedication

(Music may be played while the offering is collected.)

A portion of the offering may be used to support a named local, Black-led community organisation. This will be a local church decision. [Seek the organisation's agreement, describe its work accurately and state clearly how the offering will be divided].

Offering prayer: Generous God, receive these gifts and the lives from which they come. Bless all that is shared for the protection of dignity, the repair of injustice and the flourishing of communities. Give wisdom to those who use these resources and accountability to all who offer them. Amen.

All-age activity: The communities around us

Prepare several cards in advance, each one bearing the name of a particular 'community' – including family; neighbourhood; elders; young people; church; school; friendships; heritage; artists; carers; campaigners; migrants; refugees; those who came before us. Have blank cards and pens available.

Invite children, young people and adults to take part.

Leader: A community can be made through family ties, place, shared history, friendship, faith, work, creativity or struggle. Some communities are inherited. Some are chosen. Some hold us for a season. Some remain part of us across distance and time.

I will name several communities. As you hear one that has helped form or sustain you, I invite you to raise a hand, place a hand over your heart, or simply hold the name quietly.

(Hold up the prepared cards one at a time and read out the name of the community. As each is named, place it in a wide circle around the open Bible.)

Leader: Which other communities should be honoured here today?

(Encourage responses from the congregation. Invite participants to write one community on each card and to place the cards around the Bible. People may also name a community they hope will grow.)

Leader: The Bible stands among these names because God's Word comes to us through communities: people who remembered, told, argued, prayed, wrote, translated, sang and lived the faith. We receive Scripture within a living company of witnesses.

Prayer of thanksgiving for community

Living God,

We thank you for people who carried wisdom when institutions dismissed them;
for elders who preserved memory;
for parents and carers who stretched limited resources;
for teachers who opened minds;
for neighbours who shared food and news;
for artists who gave shape to longing;
for organisers who turned private pain into public courage;
for children and young people who keep asking what the world could become.

We give thanks for Black churches, fellowships and movements
that created places of worship, refuge, leadership and belonging in the face of hostility.

We remember communities across Africa and the Caribbean,
and communities formed through migration to Britain,
whose gifts have renewed the Church's prayer, theology, music and public witness.

**All: For lives shared, dignity defended and hope made visible,
we thank you, God of every generation. Amen.**

Hymn: *The Love of God is Broad Like Beach and Meadow*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 133
(After the reading, use the following response.)

Reader: Where people dwell together in dignity and peace,
All: God commands blessing and life.

Gospel reading: Mark 2:1–12
(After the reading, use the following response.)

Reader: For the Gospel of Christ:
All: Praise to Christ, the Living Word.

Hymn: *In Christ There is No East or West*

Sermon: **They Broke Through the Roof**

The house is full. People have come to hear Jesus, and the crowd extends beyond the doorway. From inside, this may look like success: a room alive with attention, a teacher surrounded by eager listeners. From the street, the same gathering looks different. A paralysed man has been carried to the house by four friends, but the entrance is closed to them by other bodies.

Mark gives us a scene in which access depends upon where a person stands. The people nearest Jesus can hear every word. The person whose need has brought friends across the town cannot enter. The crowd has gathered around good news, yet its arrangement has become a barrier to someone seeking that good news.

The man and his friends refuse to accept the crowded doorway as an obstacle. The friends climb, lifting their friend, and break through the roof. Then they lower him into the centre of the room. Their action is defiant, disruptive, and shared. Each person plays their part. They trust each other and together create an opening where the existing entrance has failed.

Black history contains countless acts of such communal courage. People have succeeded in making creative breakthroughs. They created openings in societies and churches that had obstructed their flourishing — formed congregations when welcome was withheld, established mutual aid societies, supplementary schools, newspapers, choirs, businesses, campaigns and networks of care. They taught children histories that were omitted from classrooms, sent money across oceans, made room in crowded homes, accompanied neighbours through hostile systems. They insisted that Britain's story must include — must honour — the truth of Black presence and contribution.

And honouring our communities means learning the names and receiving the gifts of those who made these openings. It also means telling the truth about the walls and doors they encountered. Celebration separated from truth becomes like dust in the wind. Honest remembrance allows gratitude to deepen into responsibility.

In verse five, the Gospel offers a striking phrase: “When Jesus saw their faith.” Faith is visible here in the plural. Jesus sees the man on the mat and the people around him. Their faith has hands, feet, persistence and imagination. It is expressed through coordination. One person could care deeply and still be unable to lift the mat. Four people move together, and the possibilities change.

This communal faith challenges the habit of treating faith as a private possession. It is a journey of hope and love. When one person’s body could not make the journey alone, they carried him. Communities often do this. They remember for those exhausted by struggle. They provide language for those whose experience has been dismissed. They lend courage across generations and hold grief until a person can breathe more freely. They imagine another route when the recognised route is blocked.

The story also invites scrutiny of the house: Who is gathered inside? Who remains beyond the entrance? Which customs, decisions and distributions of power make access harder? Churches may welcome the songs of Black communities while leadership remains less open. They may celebrate diversity in photographs while budgets, appointments and public priorities change slowly. Churches may speak against racism while leaving those harmed by it to explain, organise and endure the response.

An anti-racist Church learns from the friends at the roof. It listens to people closest to the obstruction. It accepts disruption as part of creating access, shares labour, examines whose comfort has been protected and whose gifts have been restricted. It moves resources, authority and attention towards the life of the whole community.

And communities themselves require honest love. Every community holds human complexity. Some have offered belonging while silencing certain voices. Some have protected life while reproducing inequalities of gender, class, disability, sexuality, age or migration status. “honouring communities” must include the courage to help a beloved community grow more just. And what does honest love do? It seeks the flourishing of those whose experiences have remained at the edges.

When the man reaches Jesus, Jesus addresses him directly. Jesus recognises the man’s personhood and speaks restoration into his life. By the end of this encounter, the man rises, takes up the mat and walks out – a transformation which is visible to everyone. The object that once carried the man is now carried by him. The crowd sees a future it could not see at or through the crowded doorway.

Black History Month attends to such transformed possibilities. It remembers people whom oppressive systems tried to confine, and communities that refused those limits. It celebrates lives of scholarship, ministry, art, public service, family devotion, organising, invention and

everyday care. It asks the Church to recognise where God has already been at work through Black communities, and to join that work with humility.

The friends broke open a roof because they believed the person they carried belonged near the centre of what was happening inside. That conviction remains a holy summons. The question before every congregation is concrete: what must we carry together; which barrier must we open; and whose voice must move from the edge towards the centre so that repair can begin to happen?

Jesus saw their faith.

May Christ see faith among us: faith with memory, faith with courage, faith organised for the flourishing of our neighbours. And, wherever necessary, may the Spirit make us a community willing to defiantly break open a way.

~ ***Moment of silence*** ~

Prayer

Jesus Christ, you saw the faith of a community that carried, climbed, broke and opened a way to you.

Empower us with vision to recognise barriers, humility to listen, and courage to act together. Make our churches places where Black lives, histories, leadership and gifts are received with honour;
where those pressed to the edges find room;
and where your restoring love becomes visible in shared life.

Liberating, loving, life-giving God, lead us to be those who break through. Amen.

Hymn: *For Everyone Born, a Place at the Table*

Prayers of intercession (responsive)

Voice 1: We pray for Black communities across Britain:

for children growing into their identity;
for elders carrying long memory;
for families stretched by the cost of living;
for people facing racial harassment, unequal treatment or isolation;
for those whose achievements are celebrated while their burdens remain unseen.
Strengthen networks of care, creativity, worship and public action.

God of life, make us a community of courage.

All: Honour every life; strengthen every community.

Voice 2: We pray for communities facing war, occupation, forced migration, climate disaster, hunger and political violence.

We remember lands across Africa and the Caribbean whose resources and futures continue to

be shaped by colonial legacies, debt and unequal global power.
Sustain all who organise for peace, land, food, education and accountable government.

God of life, make us a community of courage.

All: Honour every life; strengthen every community.

Voice 1: We pray for migrants, refugees and people seeking sanctuary;
for those living under threat of detention or removal;
for families divided by borders;
for people facing hostility in public speech and policy.
Bless those who offer legal support, shelter, friendship and advocacy.
Shape these lands into a place where human dignity guides public life.

God of life, make us a community of courage.

All: Honour every life; strengthen every community.

Voice 2: We pray for the churches of Britain.
Bring to light the habits and structures through which racism continues.
Strengthen Black ministers, theologians, lay leaders, children and young people.
Give every denomination courage to examine leadership, finance, safeguarding, worship,
education and public witness.
Lead us from apology into sustained repair.

God of life, make us a community of courage.

All: Honour every life; strengthen every community.

Voice 1: We pray for this locality and name before you its schools, care homes, hospitals,
businesses, community groups and places of worship.

(Congregations may add specific local concerns and name local organisations with permission.)

Give strength to all whose work holds people together.
Show us where partnership, advocacy and practical service are needed.

God of life, make us a community of courage.

All: Honour every life; strengthen every community.

Voice 2: We pray for all who are ill, grieving, anxious or exhausted, and for those whose pain is
known to you alone.

(Silence is kept. Names may be spoken, with permission.)

Surround them with people who can carry hope, share practical care and remain present
through the long work of healing.

God of life, make us a community of courage.

All: Honour every life; strengthen every community.

Minister/Leader: God of our ancestors and our descendants, gather these prayers with the prayers of your whole Church. Keep us faithful in love, courageous in justice, and open to the future you are bringing through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Act of commitment (optional)

(Invite the congregation to stand or remain seated according to need. The leader may gesture towards the circle of community cards.)

Leader: We have remembered communities that made a way. We have heard the Gospel of friends who carried one another and broke open an entrance. Let us commit ourselves to the life God calls us to share.

Will you listen to Black voices with attention, receive Black leadership with respect and learn the histories that shape our common life?

All: With the help of God, we will listen, learn and honour.

Will you work to recognise racism wherever it is found, including personal behaviour, church structures and public life, and join others in challenging it?

All: With the help of God, we will speak truth and seek change.

Will you share power, resources and responsibility, so that every gift may serve the flourishing of the whole community?

All: With the help of God, we will make room and practise justice.

Will you remain accountable for these promises beyond this month, returning to them in worship, leadership and action?

All: With the help of God, we will continue the work together.

God of life, receive these promises.

Where our courage falters, strengthen us.

Where our understanding is partial, teach us.

Where repair is required, guide our steps.

Make our churches communities in which your justice and joy can flourish.

Amen

Closing hymn: *We Are Marching in the Light of God* (Siyahamba).

Blessing

May the God who heard the cry of an oppressed people give you courage to hear and respond.
May Christ, who saw the faith of a community, strengthen you to carry hope and break open new ways.

May the Holy Spirit, who gathers many peoples and languages, form you into a community of truth, repair and rejoicing.

And may the blessing of God, Source of life, Living Word and Holy Spirit, rest upon you, and remain with you, now and always.

All: Amen.

The Grace

All: The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God and the community of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forevermore ~ Amen.

Minister/Leader: Go in peace. Honour the communities around you. Join the communities that are creating freedom. Build communities in which life can flourish.

All: We go in the strength of God. Thanks be to God.

Continuing the commitment

A national Black History Month service gains integrity when worship leads into sustained practice. Churches may choose one action to begin within four weeks and identify the people responsible for carrying it forward.

Listen: Host a facilitated conversation with local Black communities about their experiences, hopes and priorities. Agree beforehand how insights will influence decisions.

Learn: Study the Black history of the Church, denomination and locality, including the presence of enslavement, colonial wealth, migration and racial exclusion.

Review: Examine who holds visible and less visible authority in worship, governance, employment, finance and safeguarding.

Partner: Develop a reciprocal relationship with a local, Black-led organisation. Begin by asking what support is useful and what accountability should accompany it.

Repair: Identify a concrete change in policy, budget, representation or use of property that addresses an inherited or continuing injustice.

Return: Revisit the congregation's commitments at least twice before Black History Month 2027 and report honestly on progress, resistance and further work.