

## Sources and Thanks

Opening Responses adapted from the Exultset by Andy Braunston  
Affirmation of Faith from the Christian Reformed Church of America  
All other prayers and liturgy by the Rev'd Janet Sutton Webb.

Praise to the Lord The Almighty Sung in Westminster Abbey  
Be Thou My Vision from BBC's Songs of Praise  
Scarborough Fair Sanctus recorded by Kevin Mayhew Ltd  
Love Divine from the BBC's Songs of Praise  
NigtHingaleS sung by Jo Baird of Nairn URC.

Thanks to John Wilcox, the Rev'd John Young, Liane Todd, Carol Tubbs, and Anne Hewling for reading the spoken parts of the service and to Barrhead URC for the recording of the opening responses, Affirmation of Faith and the Lord's Prayer.

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## Sunday Service from the

**United Reformed Church's Daily Devotions**  
**Sunday, 10th May, 2010**



## Welcome

Hello everyone, and welcome to our service for today. I am the Rev'd Janet Sutton Webb, and I am speaking to you from Littleport near Ely in Cambridgeshire. I am a United Reformed Church minister, but I also work for Ely Diocese of the Church of England as an Evangelism Coach. It is an absolute delight to be able to share in worship with you today, and I want you to know that you are all most welcome. So let us join together as we worship God.

## Call To Worship

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! **He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels! Exult, all creation around God's throne! Jesus, our King, is risen! Sound the trumpet of salvation!

## Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels!

Rejoice, O Earth, in shining splendour, radiant in the brightness of our King!  
Jesus has conquered! Glory fills you! Darkness vanishes for ever!

## Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels!

Rejoice, O holy Church! Exult in glory! The risen Saviour shines upon you!  
Let this place resound with joy, as we sing, echoing the mighty song of all  
God's people!

**Hymn:** *Praise to the Lord, the almighty, the King of creation*

Joachim Neander (1650-1680)

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty,  
the King of creation!  
O my soul, praise Him,  
for He is thy health and salvation!  
Come ye who hear,  
brothers and sisters draw near;  
praise Him  
in glad adoration!

2: Praise to the Lord, who o'er all  
things so wondrously reigneth,  
shelters thee under his wings,  
and so gently sustaineth!  
Hast thou not seen  
all that is needful has been  
granted in what he ordaineth

3: Praise to the Lord,  
who doth prosper  
thy work and defend thee!  
Surely his goodness and mercy  
here daily attend thee;  
ponder anew  
what the Almighty can do,  
He who with love  
doth befriend thee!

4: Praise to the Lord! Oh, let all that  
is in me adore Him!  
All that hath life and breath, come  
now with praises before Him!  
Let the Amen  
Sound from His people again;  
Gladly for aye we adore Him.

## Blessing

May the God who forms and transforms us,  
bless us and keep us,  
surround us and hold us  
and may the blessing of God Almighty,  
Source, Guide, and Goal of all that is  
strengthen and sustain you and all those whom you love,  
now and forever. Amen

Blessing and honour and glory and power be to our God for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Music as we Take Communion**

*NiGhtingaleS by Jo Baird of Nairn URC.*

**Prayer After Communion**

Most gracious God, we praise you for what you have given and for what you have promised us here. You have made us one with all your people in heaven and on earth. You have fed us with the bread of life, and renewed us for your service. Now we give ourselves to you; and we ask that our daily living may be part of the life of your kingdom, and that our love may be your love reaching out into the life of the world; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Hymn:**   *Love Divine, all loves excelling*  
              Charles Wesley (1747)

Love divine, all loves excelling, Joy of heav'n to earth come down: fix in us thy humble dwelling, all thy faithful mercies crown: Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure, unbounded love thou art; visit us with thy salvation, enter ev'ry trembling heart.	2 Come, Almighty to deliver, let us all thy life receive; suddenly return, and never, nevermore thy temples leave. Thee we would be always blessing, serve thee as thy hosts above, pray & praise thee without ceasing, glory in thy perfect love.
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3: Finish, then, thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be:  
let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee;  
changed from glory into glory, 'til in heav'n we take our place,  
'til we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise.

**Prayers of Approach, Confession and Assurance of Pardon**

Almighty and ever-loving God, we come before you in adoration and in worship. We come, as members of your Body, the Body of Christ, numbered as many, yet brought together, in faith and action, as one.

We come, O God, as we are, still with our hopes and our dreams, but at this dark time, particularly aware of our frailties and our fears.

We come, God of grace and God of comfort, knowing that you are with us and for us; through your Son, Jesus Christ, our redeemer and friend. We praise and thank you for that great gift, God-made-human, come to us as one of us; and who stands alongside us today, our strength and help in this time of trouble.

We come before you, forgiving God, fully aware of your hand which holds us, yet knowing that, in our weakness, sometimes we fail you. For those occasions on which we have been less than gracious, when our frustrations have led us to harsh words or cruel thoughts, when our despair of the current situation has caused us to lose hope, we say sorry.

I invite you in a moment of silence to confess your sins, and hear the words of Jesus' promise, offered to you, as he says: "Your sins are forgiven."

Loving and gracious God, we ask that you will remould us once again, O God, into your likeness, and make us vessels of your goodness, that we might, in our own small way, show your love in the world. As we enter into this time of prayer, cleanse and make us new, may we sense your Holy Spirit with us, firing and inspiring us to be all that you have created us to be.

**The Lord's Prayer**

## Prayer of Illumination

As we come to a time of exploration of God's Word, I am reminded of the text of the hymn-writer George Currie Martin. He writes this: Your words to me are life and health; put strength into my soul; enable, guide and teach my heart to reach its perfect goal. So with those words in mind, we pray;-

O God, may the words of our mouths, and the meditations of all hearts, be acceptable to you, O God, our strength and our redeemer.

## Readings

*St John 14.1-14*

‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.’ Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.’

Philip said to him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father”? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater

**Holy, holy holy the Lord,  
God of endless power and might;  
the earth, the heav’ns  
are full of your love.  
Sing Hosanna! Glory to God.**

**Blest is he, the one who is sent,  
in the name of God the Most High.  
O holy, holy, holy our Lord!  
Sing hosanna! Glory to God.**

Holy Lord God, by what we do here in remembrance of Christ we celebrate his perfect sacrifice on the Cross and his glorious resurrection and ascension; we declare that he is Lord of all; and we prepare for his coming in his kingdom.

We pray that through your Holy Spirit this bread may be for us the body of Christ and this wine the blood of Christ.

Accept our sacrifice of praise; and as we eat and drink at his command unite us to Christ as one body in him, and give us strength to serve you in the world. And to you, one holy and eternal God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we give praise and glory, now and for ever. Amen

## The Breaking and Partaking of the Bread and Wine

The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. The bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ. Take, and eat of it. In the same way also the cup saying ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ The cup of blessing which we bless is the communion of the blood of Christ. Take, and drink of it.

## The Acclamation

Let us praise the Lord.

**Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**

you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

### **The Taking of the Bread and Wine**

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and following his example, we take this bread and this cup, and give thanks to God.

### **The Thanksgiving**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**  
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.  
**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

With joy we give you thanks and praise, Almighty God, Source of all life and love, that we live in your world, that you are always creating and sustaining it by your power, and that you have so made us that we can know and love you, trust and serve you.

We give you thanks that you loved the world so much that you gave your only Son, so that everyone who has faith in him may not die but have eternal life.

We thank you that Jesus was born among us that he lived our common life on earth; that he suffered and died for us; that he rose again; and that he is always present through the Holy Spirit.

We thank you that we can live in the faith that your kingdom will come, and that in life, in death and beyond death you are with us.

Therefore with all the company of heaven, and with all your people, of all places and times, we proclaim your greatness and sing your praise.

works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

### *1 Peter 2.2-10*

Like new born infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture:

‘See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.’ To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner’, and ‘A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall.’ They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

### **Sermon**

It is now five weeks since Easter Sunday, and eight weeks - can you believe it? - since we were first asked to 'stay at home'. I would like to say it seems like yesterday - but no, it doesn't. Whether you have been confined to barracks alone with only your thoughts for company, or surrounded by screaming kids tearing their hair out due to a lack of fresh air and exercise, or anything in between, I would suggest it has not been the easiest of times.

Since the beginning of the lockdown it has felt, for me, a bit like entering a cocoon. I imagine myself to be a caterpillar, compelled into a period of darkness and confinement, almost against my will, yet knowing I must. And despite having no clue what is actually going to happen when my period of confinement is over, I must trust that it will come to an end. And on that day I will be able to lift my face to the sunshine, unfurl my wings, and fly. I imagine that on that day I will be transformed; because the possibility of considering anything less, in the position I am today, is just so terribly heart breaking.

Both of our New Testament readings for today beg comparisons with what I might call 'cocoon times'. The words of Jesus we hear in the gospel reading are spoken to the disciples just before they head out to the Garden of Gethsemane. And the recipients, both those named and those unnamed, are facing a time darker than they could ever have imagined. And despite having the Son of God himself standing before them, many of them are doubtful.

A few years later, Peter addresses a group of Jesus-followers as they struggle to live out their faith in the face of danger and persecution. And Peter challenges them to keep the faith, to come out of their cocoon, and to live as people transformed by the knowledge and power of Christ Jesus. He names them as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, called that they might proclaim the mighty acts of the one who called them out of the darkness into his marvellous light.

I can imagine that for them, afraid for their very lives, this was quite a challenge. I would like to suggest that, for us today, it might feel very similar.

In our Gospel reading Jesus is speaking words of comfort to disciples who are afraid. "Do not let your hearts be troubled," he tells them. "Believe in God, believe also in me." He knows what is to come. He sees the cross casting its shadow across their assembled company, and his heart is

we normally share in the celebration of the Lord's Supper at least once a month. It is a special time, and for me, the moment at which we share the bread and wine is one of holiest of all. It is one of our favourite words in the URC - normally. It is word that conveys grace - a God-given grace which allows us to step outside the mundane, the routine of what we would normally practice. I would like to suggest that today is one of those days. And so I invite you, should you wish, to pause, and collect for yourself a piece of bread and slug of wine, or grape juice, or whatever you have to hand that will suffice. I invite you to make what you wish of what we do, but to know that you are doing it alongside thousands of others, who come to their God, forgiven and free, to remember what Jesus has done for them - and for us. And so, I invite you to come, just as you are, wherever you are, to imagine yourself at the Lord's table, one of his own, surrounded by those with whom you normally celebrate this time. Hear the gracious words of our Lord Jesus Christ:

### **The Invitation and the Gracious Words**

Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. Anyone who comes to me, I will never turn away.

The peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. **Peace be with you**

### **The Narrative of the Institution of the Lord's Supper**

Hear the narrative of the institution of the Lord's Supper as it was recorded by the apostle Paul.

I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body that is for

exploiting and wasting your good gifts and taking them for granted. Now, in this time of indefinable difficulty, we plead for you to help us experience a transformation in ourselves, that we may discover your planet anew, and value all that we have experienced in the solidarity of those around us during these difficult weeks and months.

May we know that no suffering or pain are beyond your loving, healing, touch; may we hear your still, small voice of calm in the deafening silence of solitude; may we experience your power to give us patience, peace and hope, knowing that this time of wilderness is temporary, and that you are here alongside us.

Strengthen and bless, we pray, those who work to protect and to care for us. Make us truly thankful that we have food to eat and people to deliver it; medication to take and skilled professionals to administer it; help us to play our part in bringing about renewal in our society, that the weak may be made strong, the lonely find company in others, and the weak in body find strength in the promise of your eternal life.

Heal us, we pray, of all our weakness. Heal those we love, in body, mind and soul, and remake us all: that we might be more loving, more giving and more ready to see beyond ourselves.

In a time of quite I invite you to lay before God those people and situations whose burdens lay heavy on your heart. Let us be still, and know that in the quietness, God hears you...

All these prayers we gather together and offer to you, O God, in Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Holy Communion**

### *Introduction*

Year by year, in United Reformed Churches up and down the country,

moved with love and compassion for them. These followers cannot know what comes next. They do not foresee what Jesus does, although there is little doubt from what he tells them: it is not going to be easy. Jesus' words in John 14 might be familiar, particularly to those of us who have been to many funerals. They are familiar words, meant to comfort those who mourn, but one of the drawbacks is that, perhaps they are associated with darkness and death. But they are, in fact, words Jesus addresses to the living, yes, to those who are living in darkness, those who mourn, those whose cocoon is yet to split apart so that its inhabitant can fly into the daylight. But they are words of promise, addressed to the disciples so that they may take them onwards with them through life. They are words, not just of consolation; they are words with real power.

With those words Jesus seals a bond with his followers. It is a bond extended, only 24 hours later, to Mary and the beloved disciple as they stand at the foot of the cross. It is a bond which existed among the earliest followers, through generations of Jesus-believers, and holds true with we who follow him today. For they are words of eternal promise: Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself. The bond which Christ seals with those words are words that can give us confidence today: whoever we are, however we are feeling, whatever our fears of the future: they are words Christ speaks to us: we are his. And he is ours. Now and for ever.

That bond, the bond initiated on the night of the Last Supper, and sealed at the foot of the cross, is our bond: an eternal, unbreakable bond of the kind experienced by people of faith. It is a bond which calls us to draw together in the shadow of the cross, during those times when we enter into darkness, into the wilderness, with our experiences of tragedy, loss and deep, deep grief. It is a bond which calls us into solidarity with each other and with Christ, regardless of our gender, age or identity. It is a

bond which unites people, even if they don't have anything in common or even particularly like each other very much. And it is bond which promises, even in the darkest times, a future fuelled by faith, hope and love, and yes, the light of transformation.

So whether you are currently feeling enveloped in darkness, or you are beginning to sense the light; whether you feel close to the end of our wilderness experience or on a relentless path; whether your faith has been strengthened by this period or seriously challenged by it, know this: through the words of scripture, the evidence of history, and the very beat of your heart, that you are loved. You are loved by a God who knew you before you were born, who has accompanied you this far, and who comes to you now, in the person of Christ, so that you may feed on the faith, hope and love that as offered.

One day, when the cocoon is no longer needed, and life begins again, we will shed our old skin, unfurl our wings, and head towards a future filled with light.

For now, hear the words of Jesus, for he spoke them for you:  
Do not be afraid. Believe in God; believe also in me.

**Hymn:**    *Be thou my vision*  
Irish Traditional

Be Thou my vision,  
O Lord of my heart;  
be all else but naught to me,  
save that Thou art  
be Thou my best thought,  
in the day and the night;  
both waking and sleeping,  
Thy presence my light.

2: Be Thou my wisdom,  
be Thou my true word;  
Be Thou ever with thee  
and I with thee, Lord.  
be Thou my great Father;  
and I Thy true child,  
be Thou in me dwelling  
and I with Thee one.

3: Be Thou my breastplate  
my sword for the fight  
be Thou my whole armour  
be Thou my true might  
be Thou my storm's shelter  
be Thou my strong tower.  
O raise thou me heavenward  
great Power of my power.

4: High king of heaven,  
thou Heaven's bright sun!  
O grant me its joys  
after victory is won  
great Heart of my own heart,  
whatever befall,  
Still be my vision,  
O Ruler of all.

**Affirmation of Faith**

As followers of Jesus Christ, living in this world—which some seek to control, but which others view with despair—we declare with joy and trust: **our world belongs to God!**

From the beginning, through all the crises of our times, until His Kingdom fully comes, God keeps covenant forever. **Our world belongs to God!**

We rejoice in the goodness of God, renounce the works of darkness, and dedicate ourselves to holy living, for **our world belongs to God!**

As committed disciples, called to faithful obedience, and set free for joyful praise, we offer our hearts and lives to do God's work in his world, for **our world belongs to God!**

With tempered impatience, eager to see injustice ended, we expect the Day of the Lord. And we are confident that the light which shines in the present darkness will fill the earth when Christ appears for **our world belongs to God!**

**Prayers of Intercession**

Awesome God, we come before you now, aware more than ever of the overwhelming power of your creation. For so long we have misinterpreted your call to us to care for all that you have made,