

## Sources and Thanks

*Call to Worship* from *Feasting on the Word Year A*  
*Affirmation of Faith* from the Reformed Church of France.  
All other material from Anne Sardeson.

How Firm a Foundation sung by Maddy Prior.  
Amazing Grace sung by Celtic Women.  
God is Love from BBC's Songs of Praise  
Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken sung at the Second Ireland Sacred Harp Convention 2012

*Opening Music:* Fugue in F Major, *Closing Music:* Komm Gott Schöpfer Heiliger Geist ("Come God, creator Holy Ghost") by Johann Sebastian Bach (organ of Basilica Santa Maria Dei Assunta, Montecatini Terme, Italy – 2016) both played by Brian Cotterill [briancotterill.webs.com](http://briancotterill.webs.com).

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## Worship from the URC's Daily Devotions for Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2020



## The Rev'd Anne Sardeson

### *Introduction*

Hello. I'm Anne Sardeson and I'm speaking to you from my home in Leytonstone East London, where I have been living for 10 years while serving as Training Officer for Thames North Synod. However, when you hear this, I'll have moved to Burnham-on-Crouch in Essex as I return to local pastorate there along with the URCs in Maldon and Southminster. Later in the service we will be sharing communion, so you might want to pause for a moment to prepare what is needed. You might also like to take a few moments to still yourself as you prepare for worship.

### *Call To Worship*

One: To all who are imprisoned,  
Many: God says, "Come out."

One: To all who are living in darkness,

**Many: God says, "Show yourselves"**

One: To all who hunger and thirst,

**Many: God gives food and springs of water.**

One: To all who are far away,

**Many: God makes smooth the way home.**

**God will not forget us,  
we are inscribed on the palms of His hands.**

**Hymn:** *How Firm A Foundation*

*Unknown, 1787*

How firm a foundation,  
ye saints of the Lord,  
is laid for your faith  
in His excellent Word!  
What more can He say  
than to you He has said,  
you who unto Jesus  
for refuge have fled?

2 Fear not, He is with thee,  
O be not dismayed;  
for He is thy God,  
and will still give thee aid;  
He'll strengthen thee, help thee,  
and cause thee to stand,  
upheld by His righteous,  
omnipotent hand.

3 When through the deep waters  
He calls thee to go,  
the rivers of grief  
shall not thee overflow;  
for He will be with thee,  
in trouble to bless,  
and sanctify to thee  
thy deepest distress.

4 When through fiery trials  
thy pathway shall lie,  
His grace, all-sufficient,  
shall be thy supply;  
the flame shall not hurt thee;  
His only design  
thy dross to consume  
and thy gold to refine.

3 God is Love: and though with blindness sin afflicts the souls of all,  
God's eternal loving-kindness holds and guides us when we fall.  
Sin and death and hell shall never o'er us final triumph gain;  
God is Love, so Love for ever o'er the universe must reign.

### **Blessing**

The blessing of God who speaks our name  
The blessing of God who sits at our table  
The blessing of God who knows us  
Be with us this day, this week  
And forever. Amen

5 The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,  
He will not, He cannot desert to His foes;  
that soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake,  
He never will leave; He will never forsake.

### ***Prayers of approach, confession and forgiveness***

Giver of Life, Maker of Truth, Way of Wisdom: all glory be to you,  
here among us: light in our darkness, hope in our despair, love in our  
fear. Grace for our failings, joy for our tears, strength for our weakness.  
Connection in our disunity, understanding in our confusion, recognition  
in our ignorance.

Giver of Life, Maker of Truth, Way of Wisdom, we praise you for all that  
you are and all that you do! This day, let us not offer to you that which  
costs us nothing. Let us offer all that we have, all that we are. This day  
they us not be afraid that what we offer will not be enough. Know that  
all we are is known to God. Let us offer all that we can carry no longer.  
The things we regret, the harsh words and thoughtless acts, the lack of  
trust and over dependence on ourselves. Let us offer all to God, giver of  
life, maker of truth, way of wisdom

God knows us and loves us. In Christ Jesus God dwelt with us, full of  
grace and truth. With patience and hope in Christ, God's love was made  
known to us. We are accepted and loved, forgiven and freed. Let us live  
with this truth. All glory be to you, Giver of Life, Maker of Truth, Way of  
Wisdom, this day and evermore. Amen!

### **Prayer of illumination**

Way of Wisdom, open us now to your living word; that we will know how  
wonderful you are and find you in your holy place.

## Readings

### *Jonah 3:10-4:11*

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it. But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord and said, 'O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.' And the Lord said, 'Is it right for you to be angry?' Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city. The Lord God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, 'It is better for me to die than to live.' But God said to Jonah, 'Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?' And he said, 'Yes, angry enough to die.' Then the Lord said, 'You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labour and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?'

### *St Matthew 20:1-16*

'For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When

*Heaven and earth are full of your glory,  
Hosanna in the highest!  
Blessed is the One who comes in the name of our God,  
hosanna in the highest.*

We take bread and we break it  
and take the cup and we lift it high  
and we pray that God's spirit will be upon us and upon these gifts  
that they will be for us the bread of life and the the cup of our salvation.

*We take the bread and wine*

*Prayer after sharing*

We have shared the gifts of God  
May they be a blessing for us  
May we be sustained in our living  
May we reach out in our loving  
May we know we are not alone  
May we keep the promise of God within us. Amen

**Hymn:** *God is Love, Let Heaven Adore Him*  
Timothy Rees (1922)

God is Love: let heav'n adore Him;	2 God is Love: and he enfoldeth
God is Love: let earth rejoice;	all the world in one embrace;
let creation sing before Him,	with unfailing grasp he holdeth
and exalt Him with one voice.	every child of every race.
He who laid the earth's foundation,	And when human
He who spread the heav'ns above,	hearts are breaking
He who breathes	under sorrow's iron rod,
through all creation,	then they find that self-same aching
He is Love, eternal Love.	deep within the heart of God.

For this was their last supper and soon some of them would run away one of them would deny their friendship, another would betray their dear friend, and that dear friend was Jesus, there at that table.

While they were eating their supper together,  
Jesus took some of the bread from the table,  
lifting it high and he gave thanks to God:  
“all glory be to you O God who made us,  
Out of your goodness we have this bread to offer  
it is the grain of your creation  
it is the work of human hands,  
it will be for us the bread of life.  
All glory be to you O God for we have this bread.”  
Jesus took the bread and broke it.  
He offered it to those around the table saying  
“this is my body, broken for you, eat and remember.”  
After they had eaten  
Jesus took a cup of wine, again he lifted it high and he gave thanks:  
“all glory be to you O God who made us,  
Out of your goodness we have this wine to offer  
it is the fruit of your creation  
it is the work of human hands,  
it will be for us the cup of our salvation.  
All glory be to you O God for we have this wine.”  
Jesus took the cup and offered it to them all saying  
“this is my blood, shed for you, drink and give thanks.”

Around our tables we have remembered,  
with the words of Jesus we have given thanks.  
So we join with your disciples around the world,  
with those who have gone before us and those who are yet to come,  
in a never-ending song of praise:

*Holy, holy, holy God,  
God of power and might.*

he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; and he said to them, “You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.” So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, “Why are you standing here idle all day?” They said to him, “Because no one has hired us.” He said to them, “You also go into the vineyard.” When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, “Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.” When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, “These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.” But he replied to one of them, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?” So the last will be first, and the first will be last.’

**Hymn:** *Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken*

John Newton (1779)

Tune: Jefferson from the Tennessee Harmony 1818

Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion city of our God! He whose word can ne'er be broken formed thee for His own abode.	<i>With salvation's wall surrounded, Thou mayst smile at all thy foes.</i>
<i>On the Rock of Ages founded who can shake Thy sure repose?</i>	2: 'Round her habitation hov'ring, see the cloud and fire appear, for a glory and a covering, showing that the Lord is near.

## Sermon

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you, our strength and our salvation.

There is grumbling in our scripture today. One of the grumblers is Jonah, who is grumbling at God because of the treatment of the people of Nineveh. The story of Jonah is one that is pretty well-known and is always worth telling again. Jonah is called by God to go to Nineveh and preach repentance. Jonah, fearful of what a great task this is, perhaps because he has heard how terribly wicked the people of Nineveh are reported to be, goes in the opposite direction and takes to the sea. Finding their journey stormy, the ship's crew discover Jonah is fleeing from his God and, surmising that he is the root of their misfortune, they throw him overboard, where he finds himself in the belly of a big fish. After spending 3 days and nights in the belly of the fish Jonah is spewed up on a beach. God sees him there and calls him again, and this time Jonah does as he is told and goes to preach in Nineveh. And then the most surprising thing happens, the thing any preacher might long for: the people of Nineveh listen and take notice. They do indeed repent of their wicked ways and pray for mercy. At which point God responds with mercy and, as we read, Jonah grumbles.

The other grumblers are the "all day" workers. They have been hired at a fair wage to work in the vineyard for the day and come the end of the day they go to get their wages. The story is told well and sets us up for the shock at the end, because along with the "all day" workers are the "slightly later" workers, the "half day" workers, the "late afternoon" workers and the "barely got an hour in before we finished" workers. And the workers are paid in reverse order, so that the ones who came last get paid first and the ones who came first get paid last, no doubt with the expectation that they will get a bonus above that which was agreed because they have worked longer than the later arrivals. But they don't. They get paid what was agreed, which happens to be the same as the rest, regardless of how

and call us into love.

O God we pray for ourselves,  
For the fears and hopes that fill our lives.  
For the prayers we struggle to utter  
And the words that get stuck in our throats.  
We pray knowing that you hear us better that we are able to pray,  
asking that you will help us to seek, find and fully realise  
the compassion that lives within us that they inspire and fill all we do.

These prayers we offer, words, silence, deep longings,  
In the name of Jesus Christ,  
Who taught us when we pray to say together

Our Father.....

## Communion

These are our tables in our homes, where we sit and eat and drink and  
chat and learn and play and pray and argue and so many other things.....  
These are our tables in our homes, and they are also God's tables.

Let us look at our tables and give thanks to God:  
For everything that happens round them.....  
The food that is eaten, for the things that are shared,  
For the people who come, for all that will be.

And here at our table let us remember our story, God's story.....  
A story of long ago, of a supper, round a table, with dear friends.....  
In a time of uncertainty and fear with questions in the air  
and a deep sense of wondering.

The friends were together, and they didn't know it would be their last  
time together.

**We believe in the holy universal Church,  
herald of the Good News  
which frees people and brings new life.  
We believe in the coming of a new world  
where Jesus Christ, our Lord, will be all in all. Amen.**

**Hymn:**   *Amazing Grace*  
              John Newton

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.	How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!  3: Through many dangers, toils and snares we have already come ‘Twas grace that brought us safe thus far and grace will lead us home.
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### **Prayers of Concern**

O God we pray this day for the world that you care for....  
For those who struggle this day with burdens that are beyond them.  
For lives that are torn apart by war and greed and distrust.  
For all we know and all we do not know.  
For stories that are heard and stories that are hidden.  
For names that are familiar and names that are lost.  
We pray O God, knowing that you love your world  
and call us into love.

O God we pray this day for our local communities.....  
For those who ask us to pray and those who do not.  
For those we love and those we barely know.  
For all that is a part of our everyday lives and all that we miss.  
We pray O God, knowing that you love our communities

many hours they have worked. And the “all day” workers grumble because like Jonah they are really rather cross with how things have turned out.

And we may well understand the grumblers. We may well, with Jonah, think that the wicked people of Nineveh deserved to be punished. We might also think it only right that people who work for an hour get paid less than those who work for 3, 6, 9 or 12 hours. I am pretty sure that in each of us there is at least a little bit that gets the grumbling and that’s because it’s very natural to grumble when things don’t seem fair. This often happens for us when we read scripture and make it all about us. But what if it is all about God?

What if, instead of being the story of Jonah, we call it the story of God and Jonah, or God and Nineveh? Where do Jonah and Nineveh fit into God’s story?

It seems that Jonah may well fit into God’s story as someone who was good enough to do an important job, despite being a little bit flakey and rather grumbly. This is quite hopeful really, because Jonah is not alone in having these tendencies. I too have been known to be both. And where is Nineveh in God’s story? News had reached God of the wickedness of the people of the great city and God longs for change and when change comes, mercy is their gift. Because, as the scripture tells us, God has concern for all the people (and animals) of the city. Jonah then becomes a reminder to all of us that we can be quite shocked by God’s mercy and Nineveh becomes a reminder to all of us that we can be saved by God’s mercy. Shocked and saved, all in the one story. Perhaps this might be a good way to sum up something of how we can find ourselves in God’s story.

And if the parable of the workers is to be read as the parable of the landowner, what do we discover? We discover a landowner who keeps their word: they pay those who have worked a 12 hour shift the agreed rate for the time worked. We also discover a landowner who seems to subvert usual economics by paying some workers a little more than they are due and others a great deal more than they are due. If we ask where

God is, then we might well say that God is this landowner who seems to have a very odd view of how things should play out. This is no way to run a business. But then of course, this is not a business, this is God's story.

If this is a story about people like you and me becoming aware of God's place in our lives and entering into some kind of relationship with God, we discover that when our story joins God's story, strange things happen. What we think we deserve will not be what we receive. We may think we are worthy of more than others because we see our relationship with God as being deeper or older or more faithful. But no, we get what we are promised. We may think we are worthy of a lot less than we are offered because we see our relationship with God as fragile or new or struggling. But no, we get what God's wants to give us.

What do we learn of God in our scripture today? We learn of concern, and love, and perseverance, and honour, and passion, and cost, and grace. We learn that in response to a question from Peter about how much he and his fellow disciples have given up and what they might get in return, Jesus reminds them that this isn't about being given some place of great standing as the ones who were first. This is not about what's in it for them, this is about where they are in God's story. Peter, presumably speaking on behalf of the other disciples, has made it all about them. But that is not the case. This is all about God creating a new realm, a new way of seeing the world where it is not about status and reward but about welcome and grace and huge surprises. "Many of the first will be last and the last first" he says to Peter and anyone else who wants to listen, and goes on to tell the story of the landowner and some workers who come, bit by bit, to the vineyard and discover that the last are indeed the first and the first are last.

If we think that being a disciple is about getting some great reward for our longstanding faithfulness, then we are as mistaken as Peter and the other disciples. It is not. It is about joining our story with God's story and finding our way into something that twists the ways of our world that have become our norm, not least that the ones who get up early and work hard

get the best bits in the end. If we fear that we've come along a bit late, maybe only repented when Jonah reluctantly came and shouted at us about the error of our ways, and we suspect that we don't know what others seem to take for granted, and worry that God won't have noticed that we've joined our story with God's story, then we can rejoice: there is no pecking order in God's realm.

Because God is like a landowner who says it doesn't matter when you join in, you are part of the whole story: my story.

So, we care for new ones. We value what is brought, we value what we are together. And we don't fear if we are a newer one, for we are all precious. We are all part of a big story. A story that has Jonah in it, a big fish in it, the people and animals of Nineveh in it, 12 fumbling (and possible grumbling) disciples in it, lots of people through many ages in it and you and me. There is no first, there is no last, there is simply a story: God's story, and we are in this story together.

### **Affirmation of Faith**

**We believe in God, creator of all,  
whose word sustains the life of humanity,  
and directs our history.  
God is our life.**

**We believe in God's Son,  
born amongst the poor, light in our night,  
first-born from the dead. He is alive.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit,  
who gives birth to the new life of God,  
who breathes life into the struggle for justice,  
who leads us to hope,  
who is a living force.**