

CREATION TIME

THE LORD OF ALL CREATION

Online Worship: Sunday 20th September

Introductory music: 'Gather us in' The Newcastle Cathedral Virtual Choir Project

Welcome

Welcome to the service this morning. I am Karen Smith, and I shall be leading us in prayer today, continuing to pray with a focus on Creation as well as the readings we will be hearing. I am delighted to welcome the Reverend John Whitton, who leads worship at Beacon Hill URC in more normal times. John will be reflecting on our Old Testament reading from the book of Jonah and closing the service.

Let's prepare ourselves to worship together, wherever you may be, with a few moments of silence.

Silence

Lord calm our thoughts as we come into your presence to worship you. Open our hearts to welcome you in and to receive the blessing of Jesus' love, through the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Call to worship

Let us come before God
our gracious God, our loving Father,
who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love for us.

Let us come before Christ
our merciful Lord, and self-giving redeemer,
who wants us as his disciples and gives us his joy.

Let us come before the Holy Spirit
nearer than our breath, the source of our life,
lighting the fire of God's love within us, and teaching us the way of Christ.

Let us come before God to worship and adore, to listen and respond,
and to offer with joy all we have to give.
Let us come before God.

Prayers of Adoration, confession and Lord's Prayer

A creation time prayer of adoration

God of honey and halleluiahs,
of grain and grape, of ocean and orchard,
this Creation Time we praise you for the abundance of life,
and pray that the gifts of the world are not just shared, but shared justly.

God of beehives and breadbaskets,
of living webs and the weaving of life,
of ecosystems and economy,
this Creation Time we praise you for the wealth of the planet, and
pray that this wealth is not just a promise,
but is full of promise for all.

God of bumble bees and blue whales, evolution and environment,
ice-field and star-field, this Creation Time
we praise you for the sheer wonder of the world and pray that this
wonder is not about our wealth, but the wealth of our generosity.

Hear us, O God of hope,
O God of promise, so be it.

Amen.

Prayer of confession: responsive prayer

You are invited to join in during this prayer.

When I say: 'Lord forgive us' please respond by saying:

Forgive us and make us new.

Lord, sometimes we are angry

Is it right for you to be angry? (Jonah 4.4,9)

Lord, sometimes we are angry -
we are angry when we do not get what we want, when we feel we
are victims of injustice -
forgetting that you are angry when injustice is done to others,
people for whom you care.
Forgive us when we are angry about the wrong things
and help us rather to be angry about the things you are angry about.
Lord forgive us.
Forgive us and make us new.

*should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which
there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand
people...? (Jonah 4.11)*

Lord sometimes we get our values wrong.
Sometimes we become concerned about what is unimportant,
forgetting what is of great worth to you.
Forgive us when we get our values wrong
and help us to see things as you see them, through eyes of
compassionate love.
Lord forgive us.
Forgive us and make us new.

...are you envious because I am generous? (Matthew 20.15b)

Lord sometimes we are envious.
We look at our neighbours and friends and want what they have,
forgetting your overwhelming generosity to us.
Forgive us when we are envious, selfish and greedy,
help us to be generous and to share all we have been given.
Lord forgive us.
Forgive us and make us new.

So the last will be first, and the first will be last. (Matthew 20.16)

Lord sometimes we like to be first -
to be important, well thought of, liked and respected -
forgetting that Jesus chose the way of being the least, the despised
and the servant of all.
Forgive us when we want to be first.
Help us to remember that in your kingdom the first are last and the
last first, and that in serving the least we are serving you.
Lord forgive us.
Forgive us and make us new.

Assurance of Pardon

We thank you that through Jesus forgiveness is free and for all.
As you make us new, make us more like Jesus,
so we may live the values of your kingdom here on Earth. **Amen.**

God in Community, Holy in One, hear us as we pray as you have
taught us, saying,

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done,
in earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those that trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen**

Reading: Matthew 20: 1 -16 read by Moray Henderson

20“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ²After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; ⁴and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. ⁵When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. ⁶And 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?’ ⁷They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ ⁸When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ ⁹When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. ¹⁰Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. ¹¹And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹²saying, ‘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.’ ¹³But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? ¹⁴Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

Hymn: There's a wideness in God's mercy (Tune: Sussex)

There's a wideness in God's mercy
Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in his justice
Which is more than liberty.

There is plentiful redemption
In the blood that has been shed;
There is joy for all the members

In the sorrows of the Head.

There is grace enough for thousands
Of new worlds as great as this;
There is room for fresh creations
In the Lord's unfathomed bliss.

For the love of God is broader
Than the measures of our mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.

But we make his love too narrow
By false limits of our own;
And we magnify his strictness
With a zeal he will not own.

If our love were but more simple
We should take him at his word;
And our lives would be illumined
By the glory of the Lord.

F.W.Faber (1814 – 63) Rejoice and Sing 353

Reading: Jonah 3 v.10 – 4 v.11 read by Moira Bamfield

God saw what they did and how they abandoned their wicked ways, and he repented and did not bring upon them the disaster he had threatened.

4 Jonah was greatly displeased and angry, and he prayed to the Lord: “This, O Lord, is what I feared when I was in my country and to forestall it I tried to escape to Tarshish; I knew that thou art a God, gracious and compassionate, long-suffering and ever constant, and always willing to repent of the disaster”. And now, Lord, take my life, I should be better dead than alive.”
“Are you so angry?” said the Lord.

Jonah went out of the city and sat down on the east of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat in its shade, waiting to see what would happen in the city.

Then the Lord God ordained that a climbing gourd should grow up over his head to throw its shade over him and relieve his distress, and So Jonah was grateful for the gourd.

But at dawn the next day God ordained that a worm should attack the gourd, and it withered.

And at sunrise, God ordained that that a scorching wind should blow up from the east. The sun beat down on Jonah's head till he grew faint. Then he prayed for death and said, "I should be better dead than alive."

At this God said to Jonah, "Are you so angry for the gourd?" "Yes", he answered "mortally angry."

The Lord said, "You are sorry for the gourd though you did not have the trouble of growing it, a plant which came up in a night and withered in a night.

And should not I be sorry for the great city of Nineveh, with its hundred and twenty thousand who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and cattle without number."

Reflection: Reverend John Whitton

Last Christmas, one of the surprise presents my wife, Marion, gave me was a mug bearing the legend, 'My name is John and I'm a bookaholic'. There's a lot of truth in that. During the lockdown period, I must have read more than sixty books. My favourite was 'Batting For the Poor', a biography of David Sheppard, the celebrated England cricketer and Bishop of Liverpool.

When Sheppard arrived in Liverpool, he and the Roman Catholic Archbishop, Derek Warlock, became firm friends. At that time, there was bitter tension in the city between the native English Protestants and Irish Catholic immigrants. This fermented hatred which often spilled over into violence. Sheppard and Warlock formed an inseparable partnership formidably campaigning as one for tolerance and understanding between the warring parties. They set

such a shining example of Christian love that all the squabbling died down. Their witness won the day.

I was therefore pleased to see a reading from the book of Jonah among today's choice. Poor Jonah is forever associated in the popular mind with the very fishy tale about a whale. But the book is much more than that and I believe it's key to promoting understanding in our polarised and violent world.

The Bible is very honest about divisions in Israelite society between those sympathetic to other nationalities and races and those who are bigotedly opposed. Some books like Ezra take a very partisan line but in others, such as Jonah and Isaiah, there's a more universalistic approach.

The book of Jonah is a ripping yarn. Jonah is charged by God to deliver a message of salvation to the pagan people of Nineveh. Jonah is appalled by God's mercy and determines to sabotage it at all costs. Not only does he refuse to go to Nineveh but he takes a ship in the opposite direction. But God will not be mocked. By the agency of a shipwreck and a passing whale, Jonah suffers the indignity of being spewed up on the seashore at Nineveh.

Grumpily and grudgingly, he preaches to the people of Nineveh and, to his abject horror, the people are converted. Aghast at God's wrongheadedness, he retreats in high dudgeon into the desert and is unreconciled to the end.

The message of the book of Jonah is quite clear: God is interested in more than the people of Israel. God is the Lord of all creation. A God who cares for and loves other races too. He is nobody's sole possession. This can be a very difficult thing for the bigoted to grasp. America is now split by violent tension between black and white. Horrific images of white police violence on black citizens are beamed into our homes in the news broadcasts. If this were not enough, the news provides plenty of evidence that too many people nowadays believe that their cause is more important than another person's right to live.

At the very beginning of the Bible it is clearly stated that humankind is made in the image of God. Every single human being is therefore born with the inalienable right to be treated fairly and respectfully. Bishop Sheppard and Archbishop Warlock are now very much part of the folklore of Liverpool and lovingly remembered for all that they did to bring harmony to the city's streets. We need more men and women like these. It was Martin Luther King Jr. who said, "We have to learn to live together like brothers or we shall have to perish together like fools."

Prayer

May we journey with Jonah to the places you call us,
to stand with the poor and the hurt and the homeless
and proclaim your love through our living.

May we pray for peace in the world,
by living as peacemakers.

May we pray for homes for all,
by welcoming the stranger in our community.

May we pray for the poor, by choosing to buy justly.

May we journey with Jonah,
with grace in our living, hope in our travelling,
justice in our sharing, and love in our being.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

*There will be times of silence for us to bring our personal thoughts
to God*

We stand here on our earth, the core of all God's creation.
We ask for peace and harmony in our homes and our lives.

Silent prayer

We ask for a peace and harmony that we will want to share with
others.

Silent prayer

We ask that our friends and families be well;

that our house be a haven for all comers,
and our table be one of hospitality for all who need it.

Silent prayer

Just as we try to protect the earth, the soil, the land,
we pray that it will, in turn, ground us and protect us
in imitation of God the creator.

Silent prayer

May our earth and its creator protect those we love,
and those we are yet to meet.

Silent prayer

Let our homes be a safe place, a secure place, a harmonious place,
for all those who come to our door.

And let the love they encounter within our walls
go with them when they leave.

Amen.

Closing prayer:

May we taste justice at our tables.

May we sense hope in our land.

May we savour the sweetness of all we have been given.

May we journey towards renewal in our living and may God direct
us, challenge us and be our companion on the way.

Amen.

Blessing: Reverend John Whitton

May the blessing of the eternal God be upon us and upon our work
and worship together, His light to guide us, His presence to
strengthen us, His love to unite us, now and always. **Amen.**

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