

CREATION TIME

'LOOKING TO THE INTERESTS OF OTHERS'

Online Worship: Sunday 27th September

Introductory music: Word of God, renew your people *Sung by the Newcastle Cathedral Virtual Choir Project*

Welcome

Welcome to worship this morning from the churches of Fleet URC and Beacon Hill URC. My name is Ruth Dillon and I am the minister of those two churches. You are all most welcome. Today's reflection and blessing will be given by Karen Smith who has also been doing worship with me. Karen is an Elder, Lay Preacher and Pastoral Care Co-ordinator at Beacon Hill, Hindhead. So it's really good we can welcome her and listen to what she has to say.

Our opening words are taken from Psalm 25 this morning, but before we hear these words let's just be still, just come before God: pause and put aside the distraction of the moment:

To be still before our God

To abide in the shadow of God

To be with the God in whom we trust. *Silence*

Our theme for this morning's service is *Looking to the interests of others*.

Call to worship

So let us come to God with our Call to Worship and can I invite you to listen to the words from Psalm 25, verses 4 & 5

The psalmist wrote:

*'Show me your ways, O Lord,
and teach me your paths.*

Lead me in your truth and teach me.'

Let us also seek the way and the truth of God.

Prayers of Adoration, confession and Lord's Prayer

And now can I invite you to pray with me, as we come to our prayers of adoration, our prayers of confession and the Lord's Prayer. Let us pray.

Generous, hospitable God, who turns no one away,
you welcome each one of us now
in this time of worship and gathering
and embrace us in your being.

As we come before you, Lord,
we are grateful that you love and care for us,
We are grateful that you are interested in us,
even us, with all our faults and failings.

And so we praise you for sharing our life and our living,
for being within our hopes and our dreams.

We praise you for sharing our lives, giving us purpose and meaning.
for showing us how to live a life of goodness and truth,
a life of caring and sharing.
We praise and thank you for your generosity and abundant
love, even when we fail to see it.

Thank you, God, for being you
and thank you for making me, me.

Lord, our life can be so complex and challenging.
We sometimes turn the other way,

closing our eyes and ears,
ignoring what we see,
choosing to neglect those asking for help.

Lord, our life can be full of tensions, and we become self-centred
We refuse to offer a helping hand to those in need,
when we want to do 'our thing' instead.

Lord God, in this moment, in this place,
and in this space that we've been given,
give us the desire to confess our failings and our sins.
Set us free to be the human beings that you would have us be.

.....
*And now let us be silent before God as we open up our hearts to
seek God's forgiveness.*

God in whom we live and move and have our being,
your tenderness and mercy surrounding us,
and making us whole again -
restored, forgiven and free.
In your sight we are new creations,
full of potential and
vessels of love.

You say to each one of us, *your sins are truly forgiven,*
yet you also say these words, *come now and follow me.*

And now let us say the prayer that Jesus taught his friends to say:

**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**

Now we are going to hear today's readings, from Robert and Bridget Mitchell, members from Beacon Hill United Reformed Church.
The readings are taken from Psalm 25:1-9, and Philippians 2:1-13.

Reading: Psalm 25: 1 – 9 read by Bridget Mitchell

1 In you, LORD my God, I put my trust. **2** I trust in you; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. **3** No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause. **4** Show me your ways, LORD, teach me your paths. **5** Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long. **6** Remember, LORD, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. **7** Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you, LORD, are good. **8** Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. **9** He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.

Reading: Philippians 2: 1 – 13 read by Robert Mitchell

1 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, **2** then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. **3** Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, **4** not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. **5** In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

6 Who,
being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God
something to be used to his own advantage;
7 rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death
— even death on a cross!

9 Therefore God exalted him
to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue acknowledge
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not
only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue
to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, **13** for it is God
who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good
purpose.

Our hymn this morning is ‘Brother, sister, let me serve you’ and this
picks up on the ideas that Paul expresses in Philippians that we
should, in humility, value others before ourselves, not looking to our
own interests but the interests of others. Let’s sing together.

Hymn: Brother, Sister, let me serve you

Brother, sister let me serve you.
Let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey,
and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other

walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you
in the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping;
when you laugh, I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow
till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, sister let me serve you.
Let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

Let us pray

Living God, you give us the opportunity in worship to hear your
Word. May these thoughts I bring be part of that worship and praise
and may we each be open to the response it is you ask of us today.
Amen

Reflection:

“Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water...” Do
you remember that line from the film *Jaws*? As I sat in the garden on
those lovely, and possibly, final gloriously warm days of 2020 this
week, these words came to me following the build up to
announcements about the coming restrictions to our way of living
because of the threat of Covid19.

It had seemed the virus was becoming an aspect of life we had
accepted we had to live with, as opposed to dictating how we ‘do’

life, but the increasing infection rate has certainly changed that. The conflict between economic survival for so many and the need to control the infection rate of this dreadful disease is a juxtaposition I struggle to reconcile. And I looked for diversion and perhaps solace in the texts read to us today; and what I found was an incredibly beautiful sermon written by Paul from his prison cell to the church at Philippi. It is about a community working out their salvation with each person playing their individual part in that collective story.

I chose to lay out this reading in the service transcript to emphasise the different styles & themes of this part of the letter – the introduction, which starkly states how Christians should act unselfishly, looking to the interest of others at the heart of our actions, valuing others above ourselves. By doing this, we move somewhere towards having the same mindset as Jesus.

The two stanzas that follow expand on that. The first stanza is about humility; the second about exaltation. Now humility isn't a particularly 21st century attitude, is it? Our modern culture is a busy, driven society so the idea of humility may bring us up with quite a jolt! Paul indicates that if we contemplate the example of Jesus, who gave up his life rather than elevating and promoting himself above others, we will know how to act. We are reminded of that humility in Jesus through familiar aspects of the Gospels – the circumstances of his birth, laid in a manger; when he took the towel and bowl to wash the disciples' feet; riding in to Jerusalem on a donkey and feeling such compassion for others that he healed and fed so many during his ministry.

How often have we thought that people in modern society who are successful or considered to be important may have thrust themselves forward at the expense of others? How often do we wonder at the assurance and arrogance of those involved in news stories? Yet so many people lack a sense of self-worth and self-confidence, which the circumstances of lockdown has brought to the fore.

And that, I suppose, is what can make humility seem a weakness in today's society. But as Christians, Paul reminds us strongly that Jesus chose humility & it can be a positive choice for us as well. That's a challenge, isn't it?

It seems to me that Paul is encouraging us to put our faith in God and to live by the values and lifestyle of Jesus, which is even more important in our current local and national circumstance, as we consider how we can serve church and local communities, still be a presence and fulfil mission which serves and benefits others.

In one of the URC Daily Devotions this week, the Rev'd Fiona Thomas states”millions of people have restricted themselves to their homes, motivated by a desire to shield the vulnerable, protect the NHS, and save lives. Churches have closed their buildings and carried on sharing the love of God in other ways. People of all faiths and ideologies have made sacrifices as much for the sake of others as for themselves.”

And here we go again...We are missing and yearning for so much of what was. And the solace I identified in this passage, is that by trying to follow Christ's example of humility, in embarking on the adventure of looking to the interests of others as His disciples, it will allow us to explore new ways to take out the Gospel, to serve one another and our communities. How we do that is vital in the coming months as we juggle the impact of the winter months, the shorter days & having to do things differently as we approach times of the year steeped in warm, familiar tradition. Paul calls us to have the attitude of Christ just as pointedly as he once spoke to the Philippians. To serve and look to the interest of others before ourselves; to allow and acknowledge that it is God who works on us and in us and through us.

We sang this verse in our hymn this morning:

We are pilgrims on a journey,
and companions on the road;

we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

Let's find joy in helping others in these difficult times. Forget the inconvenience and see it as a chance to live a little more like Christ; let each of us think about aspects of the life of church at this time which mean we can give service and share those ideas. Let's exalt God to the highest place by listening for God's guidance and putting our trust in him as the Psalmist so beautifully exhorts us. Amen.

Prayer:

Merciful God,
help us to develop the same attitude as Jesus,
who emptied himself and was obedient to you
all the way to his death on the cross.
Make us eager to put others before ourselves,
and their needs before our own.
We ask this through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and
reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen. —adapted from the Lutheran Church of Australia's [LCA Worship Planning Page](#).

Prayers of Intercession

Now we come to our Prayers of intercession.
There is a response to our prayers today.
When I say **Merciful God**, could you respond by saying **hear our prayer**.
So now let us pray together.

Ever-loving God,
So often we want to pray for others.
But sometimes, God, we don't know how.

We can't remember names or numbers;
other issues weigh heavily on our hearts.
Thank goodness, Lord,
that you know what we mean when we pray.

So, we bring in this moment
those names, faces, images and desire for others
that pop in and out of our minds throughout the day:

Merciful God ... hear our prayer

- For the teachers struggling to understand the needs of those in their class;
- For the Children and young people starting schools and colleges struggling with anxiety and restrictions from COVID.
- For the doctors who want to give us more time but who simply can't;

Merciful God ... Hear our prayer

- For the young families who can't make ends meet; those without work, who can't find new jobs.
- those helping people to find work, knowing that it's an uphill struggle.
- those with mental health issues and seeking help, or who are afraid and ashamed to seek for help, or who are ignored and are frightened to ask.

Merciful God ... Hear our Prayer

So, God, for all these people and countless others,
we offer our prayers this day.... And now in the silence, we bring to you people and situations that we are concerned about.

Silence

Lord, You point us to the way to care, to show love to others,
So we offer our willing hands to you.
May they always be open to receive your love,
and then for us to show and share that same love to others.

Merciful God ... Hear our prayer

In Jesus's name **Amen.**

And now we have our closing prayer and blessing from Karen

Closing prayer:

We raise our eyes to the cross
And see the Christ who emptied himself
Pouring out newness of life.

We raise our hearts to heaven
And receive the embrace of the Spirit
Overflowing with compassion and joy.

We stretch our arms towards the world
And find them grasped by the Creator,
Energising us with hope and love.

We worship, we adore,
We give thanks, and we will respond. Amen
Rachel Poolman URC Prayer handbook 2020

Blessing:

May the God of all creation continue to work among us,
blessing us as we work for the coming of the kingdom,
in the name of the Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,
and in the power of the Spirit.

Amen.

Adapted from rootsontheweb.com

Closing Music

Hymns reproduced & streamed under CCLI 6025 & CCLI 21997 respectively

Video recording produced by Anna & Karen Smith September 2020