

Sunday service

from the United Reformed Church



Sunday 14th June
Proper 6 | Ordinary 11
The Revd Jonnie Hill



Matt Collamer | unsplash.com

Opening Music

Adagio

by Bennett (1735-1784), Jenny Gill Crawley URC

Welcome and Introduction

Hello and welcome to this service of worship from the United Reformed Church. I'm the Revd Jonnie Hill and it's my pleasure to be leading worship today on this 14th day of June. Come and let us worship the living God, Amen!

Call to Worship

We come to worship like Abraham,
unsure how, or in whom, we will encounter God.

We come tired, hopeful, distracted, learning to slow down,
to notice what is here, how to wait, how to receive.

Whatever we are carrying, heavy or light, let us give of what we have,
trusting that God will not pass us by.

Hymn *God Is Love Let Heaven Adore Him*

Timothy Rees (1874-1939) Public Domain BBC Songs of Praise

God is Love:
let heav'n adore him;
God is Love:
let earth rejoice;
let creation sing before him,
and exalt him with one voice.
He who laid the
earth's foundation,
he who spread
the heav'ns above,
he who breathes
through all creation,
he is Love, eternal Love.

2 God is Love:
and he enfoldeth
all the world in one embrace;
with unfailing grasp he holdeth

every child of every race.
And when human
hearts are breaking
under sorrow's iron rod,
all the sorrow,
all the aching aching
wrigs with pain
the heart of God.

3 God is Love,
and, though with blindness
sin afflicts our human hearts,
God's eternal loving kindness
holds and guides them even then.
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.

Prayers of Approach, Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness

God who meets us where we are,
in holy spaces and ordinary places,
in the stillness of this present moment.

Open our awareness, settle our bodies,
quieten our minds, to notice your loving presence.
Remind us that there is nothing we need to prove,
nothing we need to do, no one else we need to be.
May we rest in who we are, and trust that we are already known,
already welcomed, already held.

pause

And yet, loving God, even as we say these words
we notice how easily they slip away.

We confess how hard it is to stop striving,
how quickly we return to doing and proving,
trying to be more than we are, rather than trusting.

pause

God's love does not slip away,
it does not depend on doing or proving, or even our ability to trust.
Hear good news. We are met, again, and again, with an exquisite grace,
and love which holds, heals and restores. Thanks be to God, Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

God, as we listen, help us to tune in to all that gives life.
Speak into our hearts and minds, your Word that frees us. Amen.

Reading *St Matthew 9:35–10:8*

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest." Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James

son of Zebedee and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him. These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not take a road leading to gentiles, and do not enter a Samaritan town, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick; raise the dead; cleanse those with a skin disease; cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.

Hymn *Have You Heard God's Voice / The Disciples of Tomorrow*

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Have you heard God's voice;
has your heart been stirred?
Are you still prepared to follow?
Have you made a choice
to remain and serve,
though the way be
rough and narrow?

*Will you walk the path
that will cost you much
and embrace the pain and sorrow?
Will you trust in One
who entrusts to you
the disciples of tomorrow?*

2 Will you use your voice;
will you not sit down
when the multitudes are silent?
Will you make a choice
to stand your ground
when the crowds
are turning violent?

3 In your city streets
will you be God's heart?
Will you listen to the voiceless?
Will you stop and eat,
and when friendships start,
will you share your faith
with the faithless?

4 Will you watch the news
with the eyes of faith
and believe it could be different?
Will you share your views
using words of grace?
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?

*We will walk the path
that will cost us much
and embrace the pain and sorrow.
We will trust in One
who entrusts to us
the disciples of tomorrow.*

Sermon

I remember reading a news story a few years ago about a Moravian church in the US that bought \$3.3m of medical debt belonging to 3000 local families and cancelled it. They didn't make a profit, they didn't make a fuss, they simply burned the records. Why would anyone do that? What kind of seeing leads to that kind of action?

In our Gospel reading today, we are told that when Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them. The word 'compassion' almost doesn't do justice to what the Gospel writer is suggesting Jesus felt. The Greek word that translates to compassion actually means to be moved to one's inmost parts...to be moved to one's core, to feel something deep, deep down. One commentator suggests that what the Gospel writer is trying to describe is akin to the depth of feeling a mother might have for her child, as she feels the child move in her womb. In being moved to his inmost parts, Jesus embodies the deep, paternal love of God, a love stirred and stirred again by the sight of God's children when they suffer.

Jesus proclaims good news. He heals diseases and casts out demons. And all of it is driven by compassion felt deep in his very being. We need to remember the effect that having a disease or being thought to be demon possessed had on people. We need only look to one of the questions asked of Jesus by the disciples in John's Gospel when they came across the man who was described as blind from birth. Their question to Jesus was "whose sin was it that caused this man's blindness" – that of his parents or his own.

The reason I remind us of this other Gospel account is to highlight the reality of how people thought 2000 years ago. To have a disease or for people to think you were possessed by a demon meant that almost undoubtedly the sufferers would be excluded in one way or another from the community. I think of the people with leprosy who we know had pretty awful lives, barely surviving on the margins, being forced to leave their families and communities...very often written off as unclean sinners. Because what else could have caused their illness? They had no idea about bacteria or viruses and other health problems like mental illness and epilepsy.

But when Jesus cures diseases or casts out demons, what he is actually doing is restoring these people to their communities. He is reconciling them to their families and restoring their place in society. All of Jesus' teaching and proclamation are bound up with this. The divisions we create become barriers to God's life and love flourishing among us. Jesus has come to reveal the truth that this kind of community is possible. That God longs for us to live the Kingdom on earth as in heaven.

Let me return briefly to the story of the man born blind. Jesus is clear with the disciples that the man's blindness is not the result of sin. He refuses to locate guilt in the sufferer. We probably think we're far too civilised to believe that people's illness is a result of their sin...But have we really travelled so far? What of those who get lung cancer...is our first thought "were they smokers?" What of those who suffer with drug addiction or alcoholism? Are there not those in our world who believe that it's their own fault? What if we broaden it out? What of those who find themselves drowning in debt? Did they not get themselves into that situation?

The how and what of our mission as a church is important...and no doubt we will continue working on it and trying to figure out. But the deeper message in this passage is what will move us. What will drive whatever we decide to do? What will be the antidote to the kind of thinking still so prevalent in our society that apportions blame to those who fall on hard times?

Will we, like Jesus, be moved by compassion to our inmost parts for our fellow human beings? Will we approach others tenderly like a parent would a child, without judgement and full of compassion? Will we be inspired to work for the kind of community that restores relationships, that forgives debts of all kinds and seeks to proclaim a world where all can have fulfilled and meaningful lives, free from exclusion and feeling less than for whatever reason? At a time when we are considering the future in our churches and in the Church more generally, we might well ask what this compassion might look like in practice for us.

It might sound dramatic to speak of casting out unclean spirits and curing every disease and sickness. But perhaps the question is simpler: how do

we participate in the work of healing and restoration in the places where we find ourselves? If you are a doctor or nurse or psychologist, then healing and curing might indeed be part of your calling...But what about the rest of us? Well, we might support charities that seek to offer healing and restoration. Or we might decide that systems which protect the vulnerable, like welfare or the NHS, are worth fighting for.

Much of the time, compassion will look like steady, ordinary faithfulness, choosing not to turn away, refusing to blame, standing alongside those who are struggling. But sometimes compassion also looks bold. Sometimes it interrupts the normal order of things. Sometimes it costs something. Perhaps that Moravian church in the US simply allowed itself to see, to really see their neighbours and to be moved. They didn't cure every disease, and they didn't fix the American healthcare system. But they loosened bonds, they lifted shame and they restored dignity. And this is what the Kingdom looks like when it comes near.

Whenever compassion refuses blame, whenever dignity is restored, whenever debt is forgiven and people are brought back into community, the Kingdom comes close, on earth as in heaven. Thanks be to God, Amen.

Hymn *Sacred the Body God Has Created*

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sung by members of the First Congregational Church of Houston, USA

Sacred the body
God has created,
temple of Spirit
that dwells deep inside.
Cherish each person;
nurture creation.
Treat flesh as holy,
that love may abide.

2 Bodies are varied,
made in all sizes,
pale, full of colour,
both fragile and strong.
Holy the difference,
gift of the Maker,
so let us honour
each story and song.

3 Love respects persons,
bodies and boundaries.
Love does not batter,
neglect, or abuse.

Love touches gently,
never coercing.
Love leaves the other
with power to choose.

4 Holy of holies, God ever loving,
make us your temples; indwell all we do.
May we be careful, tender, and caring,
so may our bodies give honour to you.

Statement of Faith

**We believe in God,
whose love is the source of all life and the desire of our lives;
whose love was given a human face in Jesus of Nazareth;
whose love was crucified by the evil that waits to enslave us all;
and, whose love, defeating even death,
is our glorious promise of freedom.**

**Therefore, though we are sometimes fearful
and full of doubt, we trust that love.**

**And in the name of Jesus Christ,
we commit ourselves in the service of others:
to seek justice and to live in peace;
to care for the earth
and to share the commonwealth of God's goodness;
to live in the freedom of forgiveness
and in the power of the Spirit of Love;
and in the company of all the faithful –
past, present, and yet to come –
so to be the Church, for the glory of God. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

Christ who was moved with compassion, you noticed the crowds, harassed, weary and searching for rest.

We bring before you now, the needs of the world you love.

We pray for all who are worn down by life's adversities,
for those living with illness or pain,
for all struggling with stress or burnout,
and for people carrying grief and loss.
May each one be met with loving care, understanding and kindness.

We pray for all who live on the margins of society,
for those who are excluded or judged,
for all pushed to the edge through situation or circumstance,
for people reduced to labels and hollow stereotypes.
Where blame has spread like contagion,
may dignity and humanity take root instead.

We pray for all who work to heal and restore,
for doctors and nurses, carers and counsellors,
for charity workers and volunteers,
for all who quietly hold so much behind the scenes.
Give strength for long days, patience when change is slow,
and rest for weary bodies and hearts.

And we pray for ourselves and your church,
sent out not with all the answers, but with the call to notice,
to be moved with compassion, and to act with care.

Help us to offer peace where we can, to tread lightly and lovingly,
to trust the Spirit at work within us.

We place these prayers into your care, trusting your compassion to hold what we cannot fix or carry alone. Amen.

Dedication of the Offering

We give because it's good for us;
we give of our time, our talents, and our treasure.
We give in so many little ways and, sometimes, in big ways.
We give not in order to boast
but that through our giving we can make a difference,
embody God's love, and help change the world.
So let us give thanks for all the gifts given in this place.

Generous God, we offer these gifts, an expression of our care and compassion. And we trust, that in your hands, they will be used to bring healing and wholeness, to a world in need. Amen.

Hymn *Thuma Mina / Send Me Lord*

Traditional South African, collected by Anders Nyberg

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Leader: Thuma mina,
All thuma mina, thuma mina, thuma mina, somandla.

Leader: Send me, Lord.
All: Send me Jesus, send me, Jesus send me Jesus, send me Lord.

Cantor Lead me, Lord. All Lead me, Jesus...

Cantor Fill me, Lord. All Fill me, Jesus...

Leader Thuma mina All Thuma mina...

Blessing

May we leave this time and space,
knowing ourselves loved and affirmed.
May we, like Christ, be moved by compassion,
offering gentleness to others and to ourselves.

May the creative Spirit, living within each of us,
inspire the lives we now return to.
And the blessing of God, Creator, Christ and Comforter,
be with you and all whom you love, this day and always. Amen.

Closing Music

Prelude in F

by JSB (1685 - 1750), 12 Little Preludes, Jenny Gill Crawley URC - 2021

Thanks

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Sources

Aside from the Affirmation of Faith (from the Progressive Christian Alliance) all liturgical material by Jonnie Hill.

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