

# Sunday service



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> June 2026  
Proper 5 | Ordinary Time 10  
The Revd Andy Braunston



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## Opening Music

*All That You Have Is Your Soul*

Tracy Chapman from the album Crossroads PRS Licence

## Welcome and Introduction

Hello and welcome to worship. We think today about how we worship and the quality of our faith. We're used to worshipping together – whether at church or online – and think of the rituals we associate with our time together. Whether that's standing for the Bible to be brought in, sitting in our favourite position, having a moment's quiet prayer (or indeed catching up with our friends) there's ritual in our worship. We might, if listening at

home, have a special place to sit. When we share Communion we have a whole set of custom and practice – from the type of glasses we use to the way in which Communion is shared that we repeat over and over again. That’s ritual (though we often shy away from that word!). Our faith can be embodied in those rituals but there’s always a danger that we focus on the ritual rather than the faith it represents; it’s an age-old problem for believers as we’ll hear in our readings. We’ll also hear of a woman whose steadfast faith and knowledge of God’s ways meant she reached out and touched Jesus finding healing and wholeness.

My name is Andy Braunston; I am the URC’s Minister for Digital Worship. I live up in the beautiful island county of Orkney off Scotland’s far north coast and where, at this time of year, we’re not getting very dark at night. When this service goes out I’ll be nearing the end of a sabbatical where I will have been reflecting on medieval reform movements which each sought to balance steadfast faith and mercy with ritual observances. And so, let’s begin our worship with, as we usually do, the ritual of a Call to Worship.

## Call to Worship

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,  
**and pay your vows to the Most High.**

Call on God in troubling days for God will deliver us,  
**and we will glorify God in our lives and our prayers;  
we will honour God in our mercy and our singing.**

## Hymn *Hail To the Lord’s Anointed*

James Montgomery (1771-1854) Public Domain, sung by Lythan and Phil Nevard and used with their kind permission.

Hail to the Lord's Anointed, great David's greater Son!  
Hail, in the time appointed, His reign on earth begun!  
He comes to break oppression, to set the captive free,  
to take away transgression, and rule in equity.

2 He comes, with succour speedy,  
to those who suffer wrong;  
to help the poor and needy,  
and bid the weak be strong;  
to give them songs for sighing,  
their darkness turn to light,  
whose souls, condemned & dying,  
were precious in his sight.

4 Kings shall fall down before him,  
and gold and incense bring;  
and nations shall adore him,  
His praise all people sing;  
for he shall have dominion  
o'er river, sea, and shore,  
far as the eagle's pinion  
or dove's light wing can soar.

3 He shall come down like showers  
upon the fruitful earth;  
love, joy, and hope, like flowers,  
spring in his path to birth;  
before him, on the mountains,  
shall peace the herald go;  
and righteousness, in fountains,  
from hill to valley flow.

5 O'er every foe victorious,  
He on his throne shall rest;  
from age to age more glorious,  
all-blessing and all-blest.  
The tide of time shall never  
His covenant remove;  
His name shall stand for ever,  
His changeless name of Love.

### **Prayers of Approach, Confession, and Grace**

Come, let us return to the Lord, for he will heal us and bind us up.  
Let us pray.

O Most High, your appearing is as sure as the dawn;  
You come to us like refreshing showers,  
like the spring rains that nourish the earth.  
We meet You here seeking Your wisdom.  
We praise You seeking your blessing.  
We listen to You seeking your direction for our lives.

O Risen Lord, we meet You here,  
aware that Your love is steadfast  
whilst ours is like a morning cloud, as dew that evaporates quickly.  
We bring you our worship, poetic prayers, and rousing hymns,  
yet You ask for steadfast love.

We give You our time hoping you will be pleased with us,  
yet You ask for knowledge of God and Your ways.

We worship you on Sundays but all too often ignore You on weekdays;  
yet You demand mercy, and lives lived with a sacrifice of praise.

Forgive us, Risen Lord, and give us time to change.

We gather in Your presence, Most Holy Spirit,  
knowing our faith will make us whole,  
longing for Your power within us, yearning to follow Your lead  
as we worship, evangelise, witness, and serve,  
showing the Church's mission in our world.  
Give us the grace to accept the forgiveness You bring,  
forgive ourselves, and forgive those who have hurt us. Amen.

### **Prayer for Illumination**

Like the sick in need of healing, as sinners in need of wholeness,  
we listen to Your word, O God, read and proclaimed,  
and pray that, through Your Holy Spirit,  
we may live it in our daily lives. Amen.

### **Reading**      *Hosea 5:15-6:6*

I will return again to my place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face. In their distress they will beg my favour: "Come, let us return to the LORD, for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD; his appearing is as sure as the dawn; he will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth."

What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah?  
Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early.

Therefore, I have hewn them by the prophets; I have killed them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light. For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings

**Reading** *Psalm 50: 7-15*

"Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel,  
I will testify against you. I am God, your God.  
Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you;  
your burnt offerings are continually before me.

I will not accept a bull from your house or goats from your folds.  
For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills.  
I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine.  
"If I were hungry, I would not tell you,  
for the world and all that is in it is mine.

Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?  
Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,  
and pay your vows to the Most High.

Call on me in the day of trouble;  
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."

**Hymn** *Jesus Calls Us O'er The Tumult*

Cecil Frances Alexander (née Humphreys) (1818-1895) Public Domain  
sung by the Episcopal Church of the Advocate Virtual Choir

Jesus calls us: o'er the tumult  
of our life's wild restless sea  
day by day his clear voice soundeth,  
saying, 'Christian, follow me;'

2 As of old Saint Andrew heard it  
by the Galilean lake,  
turned from home & toil & kindred,  
leaving all for his dear sake.

3 Jesus calls us from the worship  
of the vain world's golden store,  
from each idol that would keep us,  
saying, 'Christian,  
love me more.'

4 In our joys and in our sorrows,  
days of toil and hours of ease,  
still he calls, in cares and pleasures,  
'Christian, love me  
more than these.'

5 Jesus calls us: by thy mercies, Saviour, may we hear thy call,  
give our hearts to thine obedience, serve and love thee best of all.

**Reading**      *St Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26*

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax-collection station, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with Jesus and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous but sinners." While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, for she was saying to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well." Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." and the woman was made well from that moment. When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, "Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. And the report of this spread through all of that district.

## Sermon

Faith is a funny old thing really. We often assume it's about the rituals we practice – and we have rituals even though we don't think we do! – or about our Biblical knowledge, the prayers we pray, the hymns we sing, or what we do on a Sunday morning. Of course, all those things are part of what it means to have faith, to be a Christian, but it's not the central facet of our faith. Our readings today show that discipline and reproach are also bound up with faith. That seems rather against the spirit of the age and the spirit of the contemporary Church where we've rather moved away from ideas of discipline, reproach, and judgement. Yet those themes shout out in our readings as does the central, vital, idea that faith needs to be active and steadfast. In Hosea and Psalm 50 God reproaches the people their serial infidelity and, in our Gospel reading, Jesus reproaches the faithful for their attitude to the unfaithful. Of course, we can't listen to all this reproach without thinking about how it might all apply to us.

Those we call prophets in the Old Testament were people convinced that God had spoken to them and given them a message for either the king or the people. Hosea ministered in the second half of the 8th Century BCE between the long peaceful reign of Jeroboam II to disastrous reign of Hoshea the last king of Israel before it fell to the invading Assyrians. Hoshea, the final northern king, tried to play the two great superpowers of his age, Egypt and Assyria, off against each other resulting in the Assyrian emperor invading, carting people off to exile, and ending the separate existence of the northern kingdom of Israel as a Jewish state.

Hosea prophesied this ignoble end of the northern Jewish state of Israel seeing it as punishment by God for their sins. Famously Hosea took a woman as a wife who was unfaithful to him; embodying in his own life Israel's infidelity to God in troubling, violence, misogynistic passages. Today's passage has God saying He will not return to the people until they repent. We are left waiting for a response from the people, and God's exasperation in the final verses is clear; the people's love is like a morning

cloud or evaporating dew. The final verse in today's selection demands love not sacrifice; knowledge of God not burnt offerings.

It's easy to read these words and feel smug; we're not playing off rival superpowers against each other, our love for the Lord isn't as insubstantial as mist...or is it? What might these words mean for us? Do we trust in God or put our faith in fickle foreign alliances? For years we, in the West, have put our trust in an alliance with America. British Prime Ministers have rushed to congratulate whoever is victorious in American elections, the Royal Family are dangled as a prize for visits to, or to host visits from, America or offered as trade envoys (though such an enticement is rather less appealing than it once was). Over recent years the folly of relying on an unreliable friend has been made apparent. When Ukraine gave up its nuclear weapons it gained security guarantees from both America and Russia; guarantees that lay splattered with the blood of the thousands killed since Russia attempted to invade and subdue. Of course, trust in God does not replace foreign policy but trust in God might make us make wiser choices.

And then how sincere is our religious life? Hosea was critical of a people who offered sacrifice but did not live with love, followers who made burnt offerings but did not have true knowledge of the Lord. We wouldn't be like that of course? We wouldn't delight in poetic prayers, beautiful hymns, lovely – of course short – sermons whilst not living lives worthy of our calling would we? We wouldn't give in the collection knowing our money came from arms, alcohol, or unfair trade would we? We wouldn't come to worship ignoring the row we'd just had with a loved one would we? We wouldn't step over the rough sleeper at the church door in order to come in would we? God's reproach in Hosea still disturbs; God does not need our worship but wants our faithfulness. More, worship is only true when springing from a lifestyle which takes God into account. God prefers, it seems a good lifestyle over good worship, steadfast love over correct rituals.

God's reproach is seen also in the part of Psalm 50 we've had today. The Psalmist called the people to obey even as God testifies against them. The wider text of the Psalm has a theme of silence – when the people sinned God was silent but now God is breaking that silence to speak out; it's a trial and verses 1-6 set the scene with God's arrival and witnesses, and the accused, being summoned. The trial, and God's speech full of mocking irony, is today's passage. The Psalmist's introduction of God's voice in the Psalm reminds us that worship is not primarily a human, but God centred activity. It matters not if we worship in a grand meeting house or a humble community centre; our worship of God involves our whole lives and lifestyles. The Psalmist has God contrasting the ritual sacrifices of animals with the moral sacrifice of thanksgiving and obedience; a theme seen in many places in the Old Testament. Maybe a modern-day poet would contrast choirs singing exquisite four-part harmonies whilst we ignore the hungry. Maybe beautiful sanctuaries would be compared unfavourably with the homeless on the streets. Possibly, beautifully run Church Meetings would be held up as examples of rank hypocrisy if our funds weren't being used for justice and mercy. You can see why poets, psalmists (and preachers) aren't always popular!

We turn to the Gospel with the snippet of a call, Jesus having his dinner, performing a healing and raising a dead child for a little relief from all this reproach but our respite might not last long!

Sinners in Jewish life in the first century were those who violated family or community welfare and might be shunned by that community or family. Matthew implied that tax collectors were associated with sinfulness which is not surprising as Luke alluded to these office holders taking more money than they were entitled to, and rabbinic sources treated tax collecting with disdain. They were also seen negatively in the wider Roman Empire generally because they charged more tax than they had to pay to Rome - becoming rich as a result of dishonesty. Jesus' attitude is quite tame towards them considering this disdain, and seems to endorse paying the required tax to Rome – a tax, of course, an oppressed people had to pay to fund their own oppression. Yet the editor of Matthew's Gospel used the

tax collectors as a foil to the Pharisees with Jesus saying “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick”. So here we have Jesus dining with people who were seen as sinners against the grumblings of the Pharisees. Quoting the end of our Hosea reading Jesus reminded them that mercy takes precedence over sacrifice. Mercy is required; sacrifice without it is meaningless. To demonstrate this mercy he heals the woman who grabs the fringe of his cloak - the tzitzit that Jewish men wear to remind them of the commandments. The woman’s haemorrhage would have meant she was ritually impure and so unable to attend worship at the Temple – though she would have been able to worship at home and in Synagogue. Jesus healed her of a debilitating and embarrassing condition due to her great faith.

Each of our readings today have the need for active faith.

The crowd press on Jesus but the unnamed woman actively reaches out and touches him – Jesus says her faith has made her well. She did something.

Psalm 50 is a rebuke of those who don’t have active faith – they attend to the rituals but not the sacrifice of thanksgiving nor the obedience to God’s Laws.

In Hosea we have a people desperate enough to play off the great superpowers of their age instead of putting their faith in the greatness of God. Misplaced faith led to disaster. They attended to the outward rituals of worship but not the inner absolute need to have faith in God and God’s provision.

The unnamed woman knew that God will heal her through Jesus and, in her need, reached out to him finding healing. She demonstrates the steadfast love and knowledge of God that was lacking in the people our reading from Hosea and Psalm 50. These passages do not condemn the Law or the rituals – after all the woman would have had to have gone to a priest to have her healing certified before she would attend Temple

worship again – but demonstrate need for faith, mercy, and obedience as we reach out to God. Our worship, our rituals (and yes we have rituals) are only life giving and affirming if they spring from steadfast faith, obedience to and trust in God. They are not bad or wrong in themselves; indeed many are lovely but they should be reminders to have, and signs of, an active steadfast, merciful faith – a faith that reaches out to Jesus yearning to be made whole.

Let's pray

Strengthen our faith, O Most High,  
that our rituals are filled with steadfast love,  
our worship practices are informed by mercy,  
and our lifestyles reflect Your glory. Amen.

**Hymn**     *The Sorrow*

John L. Bell, © 1988, WGRG c/o Iona Community, GIA Publications,  
Sung by the Wild Goose Worship Resource Group OneLicence

Don't tell me of a faith that fears  
to face the world around;  
don't dull my mind  
with fickle thoughts  
of grace without a ground.

*I need to know that God is real.  
I need to know that Christ can feel  
the need to touch and love and heal  
the world, including me.*

2 Don't speak of piety and prayers  
divorced from human need;  
don't talk of spirits without flesh  
like harvest without seed.

3 Don't sate my soul  
with common sense  
distilled from ages past,  
inept for those who feel the world  
about to breathe its last!

4 Don't set the Cross  
before my eyes  
unless you tell the truth,  
of how the Lord who finds the lost  
was often found uncouth.

5 So let the gospel come alive  
in actions great to see,  
in imitation of the One  
whose love extends to me.

## **Affirmation of Faith**

**We believe in God, the Eternal Majesty,  
source of all justice and mercy,  
who does not ask for empty rituals  
but for hearts that acknowledge God's sovereignty.  
When we turn away, seeking security in power and politics,  
God awaits our return, yearning for our steadfast love  
that is more precious than any sacrifice.**

**We believe in Jesus Christ, the Enfleshed Word,  
who sat at table with sinners like us,  
who heard the silent plea of the woman  
who believed in the power of touch.  
In Jesus, we see that God's mercy  
is not a reward for the righteous,  
but a balm for the broken.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Flame of Love,  
who moves through our restlessness  
and drives us toward change,  
who sustains us when our faithfulness  
is as fleeting as the morning mist,  
reminding us that God's grace  
is as sure as the dawn.**

**We believe the Church is an agent of God's mercy —  
touching the world with the promise of holiness,  
seeking justice for the oppressed,  
and living as a forgiven and forgiving people yearning to be free.  
Amen**

## **Intercessions**

**O Most High, we pray for the Church,**

in places of persecution and places of indifference,  
that we develop a steadfast faith in You, that we exhibit mercy,  
and that our rituals, practices, and services of worship  
glorify You as they lead us to right living.

Lord, in your mercy...**hear our prayer.**

Risen Lord Jesus,  
we pray for those who yearn for You and the healing You bring,  
victims of crime ignored by the authorities,  
women, children, and men fearful of not being believed  
when they disclose abuse,  
mothers and children yearning for peace whilst men make war.

Lord, in your mercy...**hear our prayer.**

Most Holy Spirit,  
we bring before You our own communities...  
those in need whom we can help...  
places where we can be salt and light...  
those known to us ill in mind, body, or spirit...  
those in the news today...  
and those who are suffering known only to You...

Lord, in your mercy...**hear our prayer.**

Hear our prayers, O God, as we pray as Jesus taught saying, Our Father...

## **Offertory**

Scripture gives us pause as we ponder bringing our offerings; our readings today remind us that God is interested more in the quality of our lifestyles than the generosity of our giving, the sincerity of our faith more than the willingness to give. Yet that isn't to say that God isn't interested in our generosity or our willingness to give just that these things should be

reflections of our steadfast faith, our commitment to mercy, and our obedience to God's ongoing call. So we pray for all that is given in this church asking that God will help us to use our resources with mercy, wisdom, and faith. Let's pray:

God of every good gift,  
You shower us with untold blessings,  
and now, of Your own do we give You,  
that our blessings may be gifts to others,  
speaking of Your loving kindness  
and steadfast fidelity. Amen

## **Holy Communion**

### *Introduction*

May God be with you!     **And also with you!**  
Lift up your hearts!     **We lift them up to God!**

Let us give God our thanks and praise!  
**It is right and just to give our thanks and praise!**

We gather at this table hungry for justice,  
thirsty for righteousness, and eager for mercy in a cruel world.  
In the midst of lies and 'alternative facts'  
we come to hear and speak truth;  
in a bitter society we taste honey from the rock of God's mercy.

As we gather, O God, we remember Your steadfast goodness and mercy,  
for You chose the Jewish people as Your own, gave them precious law,  
guarded them with judges, guided them with brave prophets  
who called them, again and again, back to You,  
sustained them through the bitterness of exile,  
restored them with glorious freedom,  
and suffered with them through the agony

of imperial invasion and oppression.

In the fullness of time, You became one with them, one of them,  
one with us, one of us.

Lord Jesus, You satisfied our ancient hungers,  
And through Your life, teaching, healing, death, and new life,  
we are reconciled to the Eternal One,  
called to do justice, show mercy, and live in kindness.

Yet we prefer the shiny apple, the bitter fruit,  
rather than the taste of justice and the love of truth.

We prefer the ritual to the faith;

we prefer our possessions over our souls.

We believe we can beat the systems of our world  
using our own power and politics instead of Your steadfast love.

Yet Your Cross shows the power of weakness,  
the glory of love, and both the horror and beauty of sacrifice.

Before You were given over to torture and torment,  
You shared in the simplicity of a meal with Your friends,  
and, during that meal, You took bread, said the ancient blessing,  
broke the bread and gave it to Your friends saying:

“Take this, all of you and eat it, for this is my body,  
broken for you. Do this in memory of me.”

Later, You took a cup filled with wine,  
again said the ancient blessing,  
and, giving the cup to Your friends, said

“take this all of you and drink from it,  
for this is the blood of the new and everlasting covenant,  
shed for you and for all for the forgiveness of sins.  
Do this in memory of me.”

So let us proclaim the central mystery of our faith:

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

Come, Most Holy Spirit,  
as we, in obedience to the Lord Jesus' command  
show forth His sacrifice on the Cross  
by this bread broken and wine out poured.

Gather us into Your presence as Jesus, himself,  
risen and ascended, is here giving himself  
for our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.

United with him and with the whole Church on earth and in heaven,  
we, his people gathered at his table  
present our sacrifice of thanksgiving  
renew the offering of ourselves,  
and rejoice in the promise of his coming again in glory.

All glory, honour and power be Yours, Eternal Majesty,  
through Jesus Christ, our risen and ascended Lord,  
in the power of the Holy Spirit, forever and ever, Amen.

The body and blood of Christ, given for you!

**Music for Communion** *Come Back To Me (Hosea)*

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of Vermont, Inc. OneLicence Recorded live at St. Francis De Sales  
Church in Ajax Ontario Canada by the Sunday 7pm Choir.

**Post Communion Prayer**

Lord Jesus we thank You,  
that, like a mother You have fed us with Yourself,  
lifted us to the heavenly places, increased our faith,  
and reminded us of Your faithfulness.







## **Sources**

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