

Sunday service

from the United Reformed Church



Sunday 2nd August 2026
Proper 13 | Ordinary 18
The Revd Andy Braunston



Joss Broward | unsplash.com

Opening Music *Prelude*

by Georg Golterman (1824 - 1898), Man III, Jenny Gill Crawley URC – 2021

Welcome and Introduction

We have much about wrestling in our readings today – wrestling brothers in a conflict-ridden family, and a cunning rather deceitful man wrestling with God through the night. We sing verses written by an unfairly accused poet wrestling with injustice, longing to be tested by God to be proved righteous, and having to take shelter in the Temple at night for safety. We hear Paul wrestling with God’s mysterious foreknowledge and election of the Jewish people - even those who don’t accept Paul’s views on Jesus. And, in our gospel reading, the disciples wrestle with tiredness and logistics whilst Jesus, in a foretaste of the Eucharist, feeds a hungry people. My name is Andy Braunston, and I am the United Reformed Church’s Minister for Digital Worship; my role is to wrestle with texts and technology to help facilitate worship across the UK whilst I live in up in the beautiful island county of Orkney off Scotland’s far north coast. So, we come to worship

thinking about wrestling and being fed.

Call to Worship

Come to the One who attends to our cries. **Give ear, O God, to our prayers for our lips are free of deceit.** If You try our hearts, O God, if You visit us by night, if You test us, **You will find no wickedness in us; our mouths do not transgress.** We have avoided the ways of the violent. **Our steps have held fast to Your paths; our feet have not slipped.** We call upon You, for You will answer us, O Maker; **incline Your ear to us; hear our words.** Wondrously show Your steadfast love, O Saviour **to those who seek refuge at Your right hand.** As for us, we shall behold Your face, O Spirit, **when we awake we shall be satisfied, behold Your likeness, and worship You in spirit and truth.** Come, let us worship God!

Hymn *The God of Sarah Praise*

David Bjorlin (born 1984) based on *Genesis 15-21*

© 2018 GIA Publications OneLicense No. A-734713 unknown choir on YouTube.

The God of Sarah praise, the God of dreams long dead,
who brings forth unexpected life, delight from dread.
Though grief lasts through the night, joy rises with the sun;
God leaves us laughing in surprise at death undone.

2 The God of Abraham praise,
the God of all who roam,
who guides us into foreign lands
and makes our home.
When darkness shrouds our path,
the stars, as pledges, shine;
God's covenant will be fulfilled
by love's design.

3 The God of Hagar praise,
the God of those oppressed,
who sees the lost and overlooked
and calls them blessed.
Though wandering alone
through deserts of despair,
God leads us to a well of hope
and meets us there.

Prayers of Approach, Confession & Grace

We come before You today, O Maker, knowing in You there is no injustice,

You are full of mercy and have abundant compassion,
and we bring our thanks and praise. Your plans are inscrutable,
Your love indiscriminate, Your purposes mysterious.

With the Psalmist, Lord Jesus, we come to You wanting to believe
in our own goodness and integrity.

But our lips are not always free of deceit,
sometimes wickedness is found within us,
often our mouths, and our lives, transgress Your way.

We become, despite our best efforts, complicit with violence and terror,
as we slip and lose our footing in Your Word.

We hear the lies and hatred of our society,
and are tempted to reject those in need, those who have sought refuge,
those who long for freedom.

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

We call upon you, Most Holy Spirit, longing to behold Your face,
knowing that Your steadfast love brings us home,
that we can be forgiven and we can forgive – even ourselves.

So restore us to our rightful place, O God,
remind us of Your loving kindness,
and, as we wrestle with You and our world,
satisfy our ancient hungers. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

Wrestle with us O God,
as we tease out meaning and purpose in Your Word –
ever ancient and ever new - that we may grow the will to respond,
and the faith to believe in You, our source, goal, and guide. Amen.

Reading Genesis 32:22-31

The same night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, yet my life is preserved." The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip.

Hymn *Psalm 17:1, 5-6, 8, 15*

This setting Owen Alstott © 1977, 1990. OCP Sung by Chris Brunelle and used with his kind permission. OneLicence A-734713

Lord, when your glory appears, my joy will be full.

Hear, O Lord, a just suit;
attend to my outcry;
hearken to my prayer
from lips without deceit.

2 My steps have been
steadfast in your paths,
my feet have not faltered.
I call upon you,
for you will answer me, O God;
incline your ear to me;
hear my word.

3 Keep me as the apple of your eye,
hide me in the shadow
of your wings.
But I in justice shall
behold your face,
on waking I shall be
content in your presence.

Reading Romans 9:1-18

I am speaking the truth in Christ - I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit - I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own brothers and sisters, my own flesh and blood. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Christ, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. It is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel, and not all of Abraham's children are his true descendants; but 'It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named after you.' This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants. For this is what the promise said, 'About this time I will return and Sarah shall have a son.' Nor is that all; something similar happened to Rebecca when she had conceived children by one husband, our ancestor Isaac. Even before they had been born or had done anything good or bad (so that God's purpose of election might continue, not by works but by his call) she was told, 'The elder shall serve the younger.' As it is written, 'I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau.' What then are we to say? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy. For the scripture says to Pharaoh, 'I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.' So then he has mercy on whomsoever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomsoever he chooses.

Reading *St Matthew 14:13-21*

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is

now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled, and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Sermon

They say that life can be a struggle; for many it is, a struggle to get by, to have more money than bills at the end of the month, to live with dignity. For many in our world the struggles are even worse – as people struggle for food, warmth, and security. Struggle, for most of us, is part of what it is to be human. Sometimes these are minor, sometimes they are major. We have heard about different types of struggle in our readings today.

If they wanted to make a drama out of the Jacob and Esau stories in the Bible for TV they'd be laughed at as the tale would be seen as too far fetched. Today's passage from Genesis is part of a wider story of, frankly, dreadful family dynamics. Esau was born before Jacob (who came out of the womb holding his brother's heel as if trying to pull him back). The name Jacob means "he grasps the heel" which might be a Hebrew idiom for deceptive behaviour. Certainly, Jacob's life was often built on deceit. The struggle between the brothers continued in life as, when grown up, Esau returns from work in the fields dreadfully hungry; Jacob offered him a bowl of stew (pottage in older English) in return for his birthright – the right to be recognised as first born with the wealth and authority that might come with it. Jacob's actions were not illegal but were certainly not honourable. In his old age Isaac told Esau to bring venison, prepare food, and then he would bless Esau – ie confer the status of inheritor and authority on him. Rebecca overheard and told Jacob to go, disguised with

a fleece so his father would think he was his, hairier, brother. As a result, Issaac unwittingly blessed Jacob giving him status and authority. Not surprisingly Esau was furious and vowed to kill Jacob as soon as their father died. At Rebecca's urging Jacob fled abroad leaving behind the wealth of his father's livestock, land, and tents in Esau's hands. Impoverished Jacob takes refuge with his uncle, Laban, who makes him work for 7 years before being able to marry his daughter Rachel and then, swapping Rachel for her sister Leah. This all brings us to today's passage; Jacob and Esau are to finally meet again – Jacob was worried so divided his retainers into two camps so that one could safeguard his family and flee if necessary. He doesn't at this point, know if his brother was still in a murderous rage. After today's passage there's a reconciliation but relations between them remain difficult.

Today's passage, however, concerns the wrestling with an angel; it's an intriguing story in its own right but the wrestling motif seems to be a good metaphor for Jacob's life. It's not clear at the start of the passage if the unnamed wrestler is Esau – it would be logical for Jacob and the reader to think it was given all that had gone before. Jacob is not successful in gaining the name of the wrestler – to know someone's name in Hebrew is to have power over that person – and the wrestling only stops when the wrestler wounds Jacob's hip. A new name is given (Israel) which is a pun on the Hebrew word used for God which means "God Strives" to Israel which means "Striving With God (and others)". Then, as mysteriously as the wrestler appeared, he goes.

We hear this story and ponder on the struggles we face in life – those of our own making and those thrust upon us. Like us, Jacob is an unlikely hero; a cunning man who cheated and grasped at things. A man who lost all after falling out with his family but did well for himself. A man determined in his wrestling after truth to secure God's blessing holding as fast to God as he once did to his brother's heel.

What do we hold fast to? What do we wrestle with? When are we honourable and not so honourable? What are we prepared to risk for

truth?

Our Psalmist held fast to his or her innocence, crying to God for justice. Struggling with false accusers, the poet takes refuge overnight in the Temple “under the shadow of your wings” and in the morning is acquitted at trial. Just as Jacob wrestled with God, so the Psalmist has wrestled with an unnamed adversary. Just as Jacob was tested by God, so the Psalmist asks to be tested so he or she can be found righteous. Just as Jacob wrestled through the night, the Psalmist found sanctuary with God in the unsafe hours of darkness. When we struggle with life’s challenges do we turn to God and find refuge with him?

God, however, can be something of a challenge when we seek our refuge. God’s ways are not, as Scripture reminds us, our ways. Our neat logical and theological systems can all fall apart as we encounter God and God’s actions. In our reading from Romans Paul laments at what he saw as the plight of the Jews, his siblings and kindred, who have not accepted Jesus as the Messiah. Yet, as his argument develops Paul did not see Israel’s plight as being contrary to God’s design. He was clear that God has not repudiated the Covenant with the Jewish people. Paul puzzles over the Jacob and Esau stories; Esau the first born should have been the one to inherit but God’s favour was on Jacob – despite Jacob’s character flaws. God chooses without, it seems to us, reason or favour! That’s how grace works. God’s mysterious ways always surprise us!

God surprised the hungry crowd in our Gospel reading today. The passage is in striking contrast to the earlier verses of the chapter where Herod’s birthday feast concludes with the head of the decapitated John the Baptist being served up on a platter. Instead, in these verses, Jesus shares a life giving meal where many are included. Like the Last Supper – which one sees echoes of here, this meal takes place at evening. Whilst we call this the feeding of the 5,000 that’s only the men – the women and children would have multiplied this number hugely. The story looks forward to the Eucharist – Jesus took, blessed, broke and gave just as he will do at the Last Supper.

So we have lots about struggle and a miraculous feeding that looks forward to Communion. We have wrestling brothers in a conflict-ridden family, and Jacob wrestling with God through the night. We have the unjustly accused Psalmist wrestling with injustice, longing to be tested by God to be proved righteous, and taking shelter in the Temple at night for safety. In Romans Paul used the Jacob and Esau story to wrestle with the mysterious foreknowledge and election by God of the Jewish people, even those who don't accept Paul's views on Jesus. In our Gospel the disciples wrestle with tiredness and logistics but Jesus, in a foretaste of the Eucharist, feeds a hungry people.

We hunger now for so much – many in our world hunger physically for food, shelter, and the basic necessities of life whilst the rich get ever more rich and ever more unwilling to pay their fair share of taxes. We hunger for peace in a world ever more set on war and conflict. We hunger for justice in a world where people are still executed for how they love or what they believe. We wrestle with the world as it is, even as we long for it to become what it could be. We wrestle with the purposes of God longing for the world to turn, for hopes to be fulfilled not dashed. As we hunger and wrestle, we are fed and satisfied every time we share Communion but more – Jesus also gives energy and inspiration to work for change, for the coming Kingdom. Let's pray:

O God with whom we wrestle
until the break of day,
make us long to seek Your face
beyond the limits of our strength;
that in our wounds we may remember You,
and in Your blessing we may find ourselves,
through Jesus Christ, Amen.

Hymn Come O Thou Traveller unknown

Charles Wesley (1742) Public Domain, Maddy Prior and the Carnival Band, PRS Licence.

Come, O Thou traveller unknown, whom still I hold, but cannot see!

My company before is gone, and I am left alone with Thee;
 with Thee all night I mean to stay and wrestle till the break of day.

2 I need not tell Thee who I am, my misery and sin declare; Thyself hast called me by my name; look on Thy hands and read it there! But who, I ask Thee, who art Thou? Tell me Thy name, and tell me now. 3 In vain Thou strugglest to get free; I never will unloose my hold. Art thou the Man that died for me? The secret of Thy love unfold; wrestling, I will not let thee go, till I Thy name, Thy nature know.	4. 'Tis love! 'tis love! Thou diedst for me! I hear Thy whisper in my heart. The morning breaks, the shadows flee: pure, universal love Thou art; to me, to all Thy passions move; Thy nature and Thy name is love. 5. The Sun of Righteousness on me hath rose, with healing in his wings; withered my nature's strength; from thee my soul its life and succour brings; my help is all laid up above; Thy nature and Thy name is love.
--	---

Affirmation of Faith

We believe in God.

**Despite God's silence and secrets we believe that God lives.
 Despite evil and suffering we believe that God made the world
 so that all would be happy in life.
 Despite the limitations of our reason
 and the revolts of our hearts, we believe in God.**

We believe in Jesus Christ.

**Despite the centuries which separate us
 from the time when He came to earth, we believe in His word.
 Despite our incomprehension and our doubt,
 we believe in His resurrection.
 Despite his weakness and poverty, we believe in His reign.**

We believe in the Holy Spirit.

Despite appearances we believe the Spirit guides the Church;

despite death we believe in eternal life;

despite ignorance and disbelief,

we believe that the Kingdom of God is promised to all. Amen.

Intercessions

Hear us, O God, as we bring our prayers to You, as we wrestle with the world as it is and hunger for it could be.

O Eternal Majesty, so many in our world hunger for food, shelter, warmth and the basic necessities of life, yet the greed of our world continues and the ultra-rich amass more and more resources to themselves with an ever-increasing reluctance to share.

We pray for those who try to change the way things are, who feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, and relieve the oppressed. Yet as we pray for them, O God, keep us dissatisfied that they are needed, stop charity diverting us from the changes that must happen, for we proclaim the world is about to turn as Your kingdom breaks in.

pause

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

O Enfleshed Word, we hunger for peace in a world ever more set on war, conflict, hatred and division.

We hunger for justice in an unfair world

where people are still executed for how they love or what they believe, where elites choose to divide us, lest we unite and overthrow them.

We wrestle with the world as it is,

even as we long for it to become what it could be,

for we proclaim the world is about to turn as Your kingdom breaks in.

pause

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

O Fire of Love, we wrestle with Your purposes
longing for the world to turn, for hopes to be fulfilled not dashed,
yet are fearful we will lose our power and privilege.
As You feed us at pulpit and table,
give the energy and inspiration to work for change,
for we proclaim the world is about to turn as Your kingdom breaks in.
pause

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

Eternal Trinity of Love,
We bring to You now those known to us in any kind of need...
Inspire us to help, hold, love and learn.

We bring ourselves to You and our own needs and dreams...
Inspire us to help, hold, love, and learn.

pause

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

We unite all our prayers with Christians throughout time and space
as we pray as Jesus taught saying, Our Father...

Offering

Jacob desired more than he was given, the Psalmist demanded better than life had dealt him, Paul struggled with the reality of God's loving kindness, and Jesus gave to meet the needs of a hungry crowd. At Communion Jesus gives his very self to nurture our bodies and souls. Giving is central to our faith; giving of time, talent, treasure makes a difference to so many, and so, at this point, we give thanks for all that is given in this church.

O God with whom we struggle,
bless our gifts of time, talent and treasure,
that through them the world's hungers may be met,
our selfishness countered, and Your Kingdom come. Amen.

Hymn *An Upper Room Did Our Lord Prepare*

Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City Virtual Choir Fred Pratt Green (1903–2000)
© 1974 Stainer & Bell Ltd OneLicence No. # A-734713

An upper room
did our Lord prepare
for those he loved until the end:
and his disciples still gather there
to celebrate their Risen Friend.

2 A lasting gift Jesus gave his own:
to share his bread, his loving cup.
Whatever burdens
may bow us down,
He by his Cross shall lift us up.

3 And after Supper he washed their feet
for service, too, is sacrament.
In Christ our joy
shall be made complete —
sent out to serve, as he was sent.

4 No end there is!
We depart in peace,
He loves beyond the uttermost:
in every room in our Father's house
Christ will be there, as Lord & Host.

Holy Communion

Just as He did on the hillside with the multitude, the Lord Jesus, at the Last Supper, took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and shared it.
As Jesus fulfilled the hunger of the crowd that evening,
he now satisfies the hungers of humanity in this meal.
Jesus used the simple things of bread and fish to ease hunger,
and now uses the simple things of our lives to ease need.
Jesus invites all to His table where the hungry are filled with good things,
where we are gathered up into the presence of the Most High,
where He, himself, risen and ascended, is present and gives Himself to us
for our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.
So, we gather at this table and remember a meal shared long ago,
when Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke the bread
and gave it to his friends saying:

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

After supper Jesus took the cup filled with wine, said the blessing, and

gave the cup to his friends saying:

‘Take this all of you and drink from it,
for this is the cup of my blood,
the blood of the new and everlasting covenant
which will be shed for you and for all for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this in memory of me.’

Let us remember Jesus as we recall the central mystery of our faith:

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

Come, Most Holy Spirit,
as we Your people, in obedience to the Lord’s command,
show forth His sacrifice on the Cross
through this broken bread and out poured wine.
Bless these simple gifts that they may be for us
the communion with the body and blood of Jesus Christ.
Unite us with Jesus and, through Him,
with the whole Church on earth and in heaven,
as we gift our sacrifice of thanksgiving,
and renew the offering of ourselves, our lives, and our struggles.
Keep us joyful in the promise of Jesus’ coming again in glory,
for through Him, with Him, in Him,
all glory and honour belongs to the Most High,
in Your unity, O Holy Spirit, forever and ever, **Amen.**

The body and blood of Christ, given for you.

Music for Communion *Table of Plenty*

© 1992 Daniel Schutte OCP Publications sung by the Sunday 7pm Choir of
St Francis De Sales Church Ajax, Ontario OneLicence

Post Communion Prayer

We give thanks to You, O Most High,

for Your Holy Name which You tabernacle in our hearts,
and for the knowledge, faith, and immortality
which You make known to us through Jesus Christ.
To You be glory for ever!
You created all things for Your Name's sake,
and give food and drink for our enjoyment,
that we might give You thanks,
but You also bless us with spiritual food and drink
and eternal light through Jesus Christ. To You be glory for ever!
Remember, Most Holy Spirit, Your Church,
deliver it from all evil and perfect it in Your love,
gather it together in holiness from the four winds
to Your kingdom which You prepared for it.
To You be glory for ever! Amen

Hymn *Canticle of the Turning*

Rory Cooney © 1990, GIA Publications, Inc. One Licence A-734713
Performed by Chris Brunelle and used with his kind permission.

My soul cries out
with a joyful shout
that the God of my heart is great,
and my spirit sings
of the wondrous things
that You bring to the ones who wait.
You fixed your sight
on Your servant's plight
and my weakness
You did not spurn.
So, from east to west
shall my name be blest;
could the world be about to turn?

*My heart shall sing
of the day You bring:
let the fires of your justice burn!*

*Wipe away all tears
for the dawn draws near
and the world is about to turn!*

2 Though I am small,
my God, my all,
You work great things in me,
and Your mercy will last
from the depths of the past
to the end of the age to be!
Your very name
puts the proud to shame
and to those who
would for You yearn
You will show Your might
put the strong to flight
for the world is about to turn

3 From the halls of power
to the fortress tower
not a stone will be left on stone.
Let the king beware
for Your justice tears
ev'ry tyrant from his throne.
The hungry poor
shall weep no more
for the food they can never earn.
There are tables spread,
ev'ry mouth be fed
for the world is about to turn.

4 Though the nations rage
from age to age
we remember who holds us fast.
God's mercy must deliver us
from the conqueror's crushing grasp.
This saving word
that our forebears heard
is the promise
which holds us bound
'til the spear and rod
can be crushed by God
who is turning the world around.

Blessing

May the One who satisfies your hungers,
the One offers His own life for peace,
and the One who inspires us to dream
of what the coming Kingdom might be like
make you yearn for all to be filled with good things,
make you work for peace, and inspire your dreams,
and may the blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
be with you all, now and always, Amen.

Closing Music *Basse de Trompete*

by Jacques Boyvin (1650 - 1706), Man III, Jenny Gill Crawley URC - 2021

Sources *Affirmation of Faith* from the Reformed Church of France and translated by Andy Braunston. *Prayer at the end of the sermon* by Janet Morely from *All Desires Known*. *Post Communion prayer* reworked from the *Didache*. All other material by Andy Braunston. **Thanks** Thanks to Graham Handscomb, Sue Cresswell, David Shimmin, Margaret Grange, John Cornell, Bob Rabagliat, Pauline Taylor, Diana Cullum-Hall, and Sue Akande for recording various spoken parts of the service. **Copyright** Where copyright, material has been produced in accordance with the terms of OneLicence No # A-734713