

Sunday service

from the United Reformed Church



Sunday 9th August 2026
Proper 14 | Ordinary 19
The Revd Catherine McFie



Matt Hardy | Unsplash.com

Opening Music

Bouree

by J Krebs, performed by Kingston upon Thames URC 2022.

Introduction

Hello and welcome to worship. My name is Catherine McFie and I am the URC Ecumenical Minister on the Isle of Man. I have pastoral oversight of two congregations – St Andrew's URC in Douglas and Ramsey Methodist and URC congregation. At the time of recording, I have been in post for two months, so I have been getting to know the congregations, having

conversations with key people in other churches and groups and finding my way around the island. This is an exciting new role, and I look forward to seeing where the Holy Spirit leads us. It is a privilege to share worship with you, and I pray that wherever you are and whenever you are listening, God's Spirit will bless our time together. So, let us worship God.

Call to Worship

Come into a space where God is always present.
Come into a time when God is already here.
Come into a place where we can worship.
Come expecting God to speak.
Come hoping the Spirit will bring transformation.
Come excited to spend time with Jesus.
Come let us worship God, Creator, Son and Spirit!

Hymn *Christ Is The World's Light*

Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000) © 1969 Stainer & Bell Ltd OneLicence No. # A-734713 Recorded at the Parish of the Good Samaritan, Brisbane, Australia.

Christ is the world's light,
Christ and none other;
born in our darkness,
he became our brother.
If we have seen him,
we have seen the Father:
Glory to God on high.

2 Christ is the world's peace,
Christ and none other;
no one can serve him
and despise another;
who else unites us,
one in God the Father?
Glory to God on high.

3 Christ is the world's life,
Christ and none other;
sold once for silver,
murdered here, our brother;
he, who redeems us,
reigns with God the Father:
Glory to God on high.

4 Give God the glory,
God and none other;
give God the glory,
Spirit, Son and Father;
give God the glory,
God with us, my brother:
Glory to God on high.

Prayers of Approach and Confession

Lord God, we worship you because in power and majesty
you brought the universe into being.

We worship you because in love and mercy
you brought us the gift of new life.

We worship you because in all of life's changes, you are present.
When the world and its pressures would overwhelm us,
you carry us through.

When we struggle to face difficulties with faith,
you do not reject us, but continue to hold out your hand to us.

Your love for us is beyond limit;
your care and concern, your compassion
reach out to us in our times of deepest need.

We come this day to worship you,
God, our creator, Jesus, our saviour, Holy Spirit, our inspirer.

Forgive us Lord,
for the times we have resisted change and limited your kingdom,
for the times we have tried to make Jesus more like us,
for the times when we have missed the chance
to share the gospel with others,
for the times when we have let the storms of life distract us,
for the times when we have doubted and not trusted your ways.

Silence

Merciful God, Jesus demonstrated that you don't leave us to sink
in our weakness, our doubts or our sin.

His hands, outstretched on the Cross, tell us our sins are forgiven.
Help us to hear these words, and accept what is freely offered
that we may be once again reconciled to you.

In Jesus name we pray Amen.

Hymn *Make Me A Captive Lord*

George Matheson (1842-1906) Public Domain

Massed Choir & Melbourne Staff Band Salvation Army

Make me a captive, Lord,
and then I shall be free:
force me to render up my sword,
and I shall conqueror be.
I sink in life's alarms
when by myself I stand;
imprison me within thine arms,
and strong shall be my hand.

2 My heart is weak and poor
until it master find;
it has no spring of action sure-
it varies with the wind.
It cannot freely move,
till thou hast wrought its chain;
enslave it with thy matchless love,
and deathless it shall reign.

3 My power is faint and low
till I have learned to serve;
it wants the needed fire to glow,
it wants the breeze to nerve;
it cannot drive the world,
until itself be driven;
its flag can only be unfurled
when thou shalt breathe from heaven.

4 My will is not my own
till thou hast made it thine;
if it would reach a monarch's throne
it must its crown resign;
it only stands unbent,
amid the clashing strife,
when on thy bosom it has leant
and found in thee its life.

Prayer of illumination

Lord, take a minute to still our hearts
In preparation to hearing your word read and proclaimed
May your Spirit silence our doubts and fears
So we can hear what you have to say.
Preparing for the week of service that lies ahead.
In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Reading *St Matthew 14:22 – 32*

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When

evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.' Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind,[b] he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

Sermon

Have you ever tried to walk on water? I know I have. Growing up in Campbeltown on the Kintyre peninsular, going to the beach was a frequent occurrence and I have memories of trying to walk on water. Nothing as brave as we hear about in our reading today but starting at the shore and placing my foot slowly onto the water hoping that this time it wouldn't sink below the surface. Such actions were probably prompted by hearing about Peter and Jesus at Sunday School and in case you are wondering – my foot always sank under the water. While I was inspired to try and follow Peter's example, others have sought more logical explanations to what was witnessed, for example, perhaps there was a sandbar that only gave the illusion of walking on water. Our text today is a story involving the disciples and Jesus that has inspired and challenged generations and as such it encourages us to pause and think about what is happening in this story. So, let's begin by looking at the text in more detail.

Earlier in chapter 14, Jesus and the disciples had heard the news of John the Baptist's death and seeking some peace they travelled to the other side of the lake. However, the crowds followed them and as the day drew to a close 5000+ people had been fed with five loaves and two fish. As

Jesus sent the crowds home for the night he also sent the disciples back across the lake by boat and when he was finally alone, Jesus heads up the mountain to pray. Within Scripture, mountains were traditionally the place where one encountered God, so for Jesus this appears to be the perfect place to take time to pray, take time to reflect on what has been happening, take time to seek guidance on what should happen next, take time to renew his spiritual strength by being in the presence of God.

While Jesus was praying the disciples were still trying to cross the lake and it doesn't take much imagination to picture what was happening to them. A squall had developed and instead of crossing the lake quickly and calmly the boat was now being battered by the wind and waves. The disciples were rowing into the wind, so progress was slow. Land was still a distance away and with the arrival of night they were surrounded by the darkness.

Early in the morning, while the storm continued to rage, Jesus came towards the disciples, walking on the water. The disciples did not seem to be afraid of the storm but seeing Jesus coming towards them through the waves, freaked them out. Their first thought was that they were seeing a ghost, an evil spirit coming to test them and is it any wonder, after all people don't walk on water so when they see the impossible their minds go to the first logical reason – this is not real, but a test.

Jesus speaks to them and says, "Take heart it is I; do not be afraid." This appears to reassure the other disciples but not Peter. Instead, Peter throws out a challenge saying "Lord, if it is really you, command me to come to you on the water". Jesus simply replies "Come". This was enough for Peter to throw caution to the wind and climb over the side of the boat and onto the water and miraculously walk towards Jesus.

Everything starts off well but as Peter walks towards Jesus he becomes aware of the wind and he begins to sink. In his fear he cries out to Jesus to save him and immediately Jesus lifts him out of the water. Jesus doesn't ask Peter if he alright and he doesn't focus on getting himself and Peter out of the water. Jesus takes a minute to comment on Peter's lack of faith

and ask him why he doubted. As Jesus and Peter get into the boat with the rest of the disciples the winds stop and in the stillness that follows the disciples declare that Jesus is the Son of God and their worship him, there and then in the boat.

I when I've preached on this passage in the past I focused on Peter and considered what Peter's actions had to say to us as disciples. However, I have read something recently that challenged me to look at this story from the perspective of Jesus. In chapter 8, Matthew tells us how Jesus calmed the storm so when we look at this story the question arises – why didn't Jesus simply calm the storm again? What do we learn about Jesus because he chose not to repeat his previous actions?

Walking on water.

As King Canute found out the sea cannot be controlled by human beings, it ebbs and flows or it is calm or stormy because of the forces of nature created by God. Throughout the Old Testament we can read stories where God has demonstrated mastery and lordship over water. In the creation story, after God created light, God began to separate the water, first by creating a dome, calling the waters above the dome sky and then by separating the waters below the dome to create land and oceans. In the story of Noah, we read how God used water to destroy what had been created and then made a covenant with Noah never to destroy the earth in that way again. As the Israelites fled from Pharaoh's army, God separated the waters of the red sea long enough for the people to cross safely and then brought the water together again to destroy their enemies. When it was time for the Israelites to enter the promised land God made the waters of the River Jordan safe to cross. In the story of Job, we read that the God of Israel has trampled on the waves and has walked in the recesses of the deep. Up until this point it was God and God alone who had control over water and now, we have Jesus walking on water, following in the footsteps of God. By not calming the storm, Jesus takes the opportunity to show that he is both human and divine, by doing something reserved only for God.

“Take heart it is I; do not be afraid”

When Jesus actions freak the disciples out, Jesus then uses his voice and words to calm them. While he could have said, “Hey boys, it’s me, Jesus, don’t be afraid” he chooses instead to say “It is I”. The Greek word that is used here is the same word used to reveal the divine name of God, “I am”, to Moses at the burning bush. Rather than use his own name, Jesus uses God’s divine name to identify himself. The disciples would have recognised the significance of Jesus words just as they would have recognised the significance when Jesus spoke the “I am” sayings recorded in John’s gospel. In using the divine name of God, Jesus was saying that as Son of God he was also one with God.

“Come”

While Jesus came to meet the disciples where they were, he also calls Peter to come. Some commentaries were speaking about Peter’s faith in this moment but if we look at Peter’s words “If it is you Lord....” we can see that Peter was having doubts. Yes, Jesus was walking on water and showing a control over the elements as only God had control, yes Jesus used the divine name of God to introduce himself, but despite this Peter is still not convinced and wants more evidence. Jesus simply invites Peter to come. Jesus invites us to come and know him better, not only when we are confident and strong in our faith but also when we are filled with insecurities and not sure what to believe.

Jesus immediately reached out his hand

When Peter begins to sink as was probably inevitable, Jesus immediately answers his call for help. I am not sure I could have resisted the temptation to leave Peter struggling in the water until he acknowledged his lack of faith or while I told him he should have stayed focused, but Jesus does none of these, he immediately puts out a hand to save Peter. There are no games here, just a need to save Peter. Jesus comments on his lack of faith

but more as a rhetorical question that I am sure Peter reflected on once safely out of the water.

For us

As we consider this reading from Jesus' perspective, as we consider what Jesus is telling us about himself from his words and actions I wonder what lessons are in this reading for us to take away and learn from.

The divinity of Jesus

Maybe the first reminder for us is the fact that Jesus was divine as well as human, that he is God the Son and as much God is God the father. I wonder if we don't have a tendency to dwell on Jesus' humanity too much, we want to make Jesus more like us, rather than us becoming more like him. Jesus words and actions in this passage remind us of Jesus' divinity and in doing so reminds us of there is more to Jesus than what is possible if we consider him simply as human. It reminds us that when we pray to Jesus we can pray big because Jesus is God and not limited to the actions of a mere human being, it reminds us that when we think about who Jesus is and what Jesus did, and what Jesus taught, we are also getting a glimpse of the divine, a glimpse of who God is.

Jesus saves

The second reminder for us that Jesus wants us to come to him, not only when the sun is shining but in the midst of the storm, not when life is plain sailing but when we are being tossed around by the challenges life throws at us, not when we are certain but when we have doubts and fears, and not when we have everything under control but when we are drowning and struggling to stay afloat. Jesus wants to be part of our lives in all circumstances, he wants us to come to him when we are unsure and he wants us to cry out to him when we are sinking below the water because ultimately, Jesus saves us, from ourselves, from the challenges of life and from death.

So as we prepare to leave this time of worship and enter a time of service in the world, let us go knowing that our saviour Jesus is also God the son, let us go knowing that Jesus calls us to come to him and let us take Jesus with us into the messiness that life will throw at us this week.

Amen.

Hymn *Eternal Father Strong To Save*

William Whiting (1825-1878) Public Domain BBC Songs of Praise

Eternal Father, strong to save,
whose arm doth bind
the restless wave,
who bid'st the mighty ocean deep
its own appointed limits keep:
O hear us when we cry to thee
for those in peril on the sea.

2 O Saviour whose almighty word
the winds and waves
submissive heard,
who walkedst on the foaming deep,
and calm amid its rage didst sleep:
O hear us when we cry to thee
for those in peril on the sea.

3 O sacred Spirit, who didst brood
upon the chaos dark and rude,
who bad'st its angry tumult cease,
and gavest light
and life and peace:
O hear us when we cry to thee
for those in peril on the sea.

4 O Trinity of love and power,
sustain us all in danger's hour;
from rock and tempest, fire and foe,
protect them whereso'er they go:
and ever let there rise to thee
glad hymns of praise
from land and sea.

Prayers of Intercession

We pray for those who find themselves tossed about by all that life throws at them, those who feel out of control and don't know which way to turn....

We pray for those who find themselves with an unexpected challenge, those who have much asked of them and feel overwhelmed....

We pray for those who find themselves overtaken by events, those who feel dejected and at a loss....

We pray for those who find themselves on the wrong side of popularity, those who feel they have more enemies than friends....

We pray for those who find themselves searching for what they do not know, those who feel that there must be more to life....

We pray for confused disciples and perplexed prophets, those who strive to be faithful and serve you, only to be surprised by grace....

Let us continue in prayer as we say together the words that Jesus taught us saying:

...we offer up our prayers in the name of Jesus as we pray together the words he taught us saying: Our Father...

Offertory

Let us offer up our money and talents for the work of God in this place

Generous God, You have given us a beautiful world in which to live; through the storms and the sunshine, you are always with us.

As a sign of our love for you,
we offer to you our money, time and talents,
that they may be used to build your kingdom in our communities
In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Hymn *All Hail The Power of Jesus' Name*

Edward Perronet (1726-92) alt. John Rippon (1751-1836) and others

150 Mass Choir at St Andrew's Kirk Chennai and used with their kind permission

All hail the power of Jesus' name
let angels prostrate fall;
bring forth the royal diadem,
and crown him Lord of all.

2 Ye souls redeemed of Gentile race,
ye ransomed of the fall,
hail him who saves you by his grace,
and crown him Lord of all.

3 Sinners whose love
can ne'er forget
the wormwood and the gall,
go, spread your trophies at his feet,
and crown him Lord of all.

4 Let every kindred,
every tribe
on this terrestrial ball,
to him all majesty ascribe,
and crown him Lord of all.

5 O that with yonder sacred throng we at his feet may fall,
join in the everlasting song, and crown him Lord of all.

Blessing

Send us out into the world:
knowing that you can calm the storms we face,
trusting that you reach out to help us up,
listening for your call to come.
As we go, may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit
be with us today, tomorrow and forever. Amen.

Closing Music

Toccata in Seven

by John Rutter (organ of All Saints', Odiham – 2020)

Sources

All liturgical material by Catherine McFie

Thanks

Thanks to Lynette Hill, Beverley Crumpton, Pauline Taylor, Helen Coombes, and Mairi Macdonald 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