**.Service – Sunday 28th June 2020**

**Welcome and introduction**

*At the start of the service the following Bible verses come up on the video as a way of focusing us on worship and upon God. I print them here for you those reading the script to focus your mind.*

Good morning and welcome to worship on the 28th June. My name is Richard Bradley and I am a minister in the Rochdale, Bury and North Manchester Missional Partnership of the United Reformed Church.

Wherever you are and however you feel you are welcome here as we gather together in worship. I want to invite you to watch a short video focusing our minds and thoughts on the Bible and preparing ourselves for worship today….

**23**Sing to the Lord, all the earth;
proclaim his salvation day after day.
**24**Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvellous deeds among all peoples. (1 Chronicles 16:23-24 - NIV)

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. (Romans 12:1 - NIV)

**1**Ascribe to the Lord, you heavenly beings,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
**2**Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name;
worship the Lord in the splendour of his[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+29%3A1-2&version=NIVUK#fen-NIVUK-14311a)] holiness. (Psalm 29:1 & 2 - NIV)

**36**For from him and through him and for him are all things.
To him be the glory for ever! Amen. (Romans 11:36 - NIV)

**1**Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.
**2**Worship the Lord with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs. (Psalm 100:1-2 - NIV)

**11**‘You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honour and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created
and have their being. (Revelation 4:11 - NIV)

**6**Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord. (Psalm 150:6 – NIV)

**Song: Praise my soul the king of heaven**

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| 1.. Praise my soul, the King of heaven; to His feet thy tribute bring; ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, evermore His praises sing: Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise the everlasting King!  | 2.. Praise Him for His grace and favour to our fathers in distress; praise Him, still the same for ever, slow to chide, and swift to bless: Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him! Glorious in His faithfulness!  |
| 3.. Father-like He tends and spares us; well our feeble frame He knows; in His hands He gently bears us, rescues us from all our foes: Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him Widely as His mercy flows!  | 4.. Angels help us to adore Him; ye behold Him face to face; sun and moon, bow down before Him, dwellers all in time and space: Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him Praise with us the God of grace. |
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**Prayers of approach**

Dear Lord

We come before you in adoration for all that you are and all you have created and ordained.

We praise you for your Majesty, Power and Glory revealed throughout the universe.

We praise you for your beauty, reflected in the natural world of our planet; the skies and oceans, mountains and forests, meadows and lakes. We praise you for your endless imagination shown through the myriads of fascinating species; creatures of land, sea and air, vegetation as small as a snowdrop flower or as great as a giant Sequoia.

We thank you for your loving intention that humankind would display your likeness, share your joy in and your hope for Creation. We thank you that out of your immeasurable Love, you breathed your Spirit into men and women that they too would love one another and care for your world. We thank you that because you made us in your own image; we too are eager to learn, to care, to create. We thank you that your nature is visible in our scientists, engineers and educators; in our medical & caring professions, in our artists, writers, musicians, gardeners, growers, law & order professions and in our local and national governments.

We praise you Lord that you have a purpose for each one of us to enable your creation to match your vision of a loving, vibrant, beautiful place. And we praise you for your everlasting love that flows without ceasing.

Forgive us Lord that we fail to care for our planet and pollute our land, our water and our atmosphere. We allow habitats to be destroyed & species to become extinct.

Forgive us Lord that we fail to love and care for each other; that we allow neglect and cruelty, that we show favouritism, that we turn away from the need in our communities. Forgive us that because of fear we fail to fight injustice and oppression.

Thank you Lord, that when we fail to live as you intend us to, you give your Son ‘the visible image of the living God’ to bring us back into relationship with you. Enable us by your Spirit within, to know we are forgiven, to discern your purpose for our lives and dedicate ourselves afresh to you.

In Jesus’ Name we pray. Amen.

**Bible verses – Jeremiah 1:4 - 6 and Isaiah 43:1:**

“The Word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

“Ah, sovereign LORD,” I said, “I do not know how to speak for I am only a child.”

*(Jeremiah 1:4-6 NIV)*

“ 1 But now, this is what the LORD says – he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.” *(Isaiah 43:1 – NIV)*

**Introduction to the theme/Children’s Address**

I have a question for you….are you good at remembering names? I’ll let you into a secret….I am hopeless at remembering the names of people! I remember faces, I can meet someone once and often remember them to look at even if not their names!

I have got some pictures of people or characters and I wonder if you know who they are?

1.  2) 3)

 4) 5) 6)

(Answers**:** 1) Superman 2) Grandpa Pig 3) Michael Buerk (retired BBC newsreader)

 4) Marcus Rashford (plays for Manchester United) 5) Dash (from “The Incredibles” film) 6) Moana (Disney Character))

I wonder if you managed to guess them all! Some may have looked familiar but, like me, you couldn’t remember their names.

In the Bible readings we heard a few moment ago we heard how God (in the Jeremiah and Isaiah readings) spoke about how well God knows us.

We heard something about how special we are. Before we were even born God knew us and knew

what we would look like (Jeremiah reading) and God calls us by name – God, unlike me, never forgets who we are and how much he loves us!

Never forget whatever we do…whether we stray from God or remain close….God loves us so much and remember who we are. He will never forget us and will never leave us.

I am going to say a prayer for us all now….let’s pray….

Loving God, we thank you that you never have and never will forget us. For each of us is made in your own image and you know us so much and love us so much. May we never ever forget that.

Amen.

**Song: My Jesus, My Saviour**

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| My Jesus, My Saviour,Lord, there is none like You.All of my days, I want to praisethe wonders of Your mighty love.My comfort, my shelter, tower of refuge and strength, let every breath, all that I am, never cease to worship You.  | *Shout to the Lord, all the earth, let us sing,* *power and majesty, praise to the King!**Mountains bow down and the seas will roar,* *at the sound of your name!**I sing for joy at the work of your hands,* *forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand.* *Nothing compares to the promise I have in You.*(repeat verse and chorus again)  |
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**Interview with Daniel Harris**

As we think about names and not forgetting people…I want to introduce you to someone who you may have seen, some of you may have met him…some of you may even have spoken to him! He is soon to be my new colleague in ministry – Daniel Harris.

Daniel moves house this week and moves North to serve with all of us in the Missional Partnership. I am going to interview Daniel now so that we might get to know him a bit more…. [on the video I ask questions and he answers them.] Please find below the questions I ask and the answers he gives.]

**Q1: What is your favourite food and drink?**

I eat most foods.

I’m a member of Slimming World so try to follow some of their recipes.

I also used to work for a foraging company and have recently re-discovered the joy of wild foods in cooking.

Our modern-day shopping habits detach us from the land which grows our food.

It is important for our mental health to re-establish that connection with God’s planet.

**Q2: How do you feel about a move to the Northwest?**

I wish I could have moved up sooner! I have purchased a guide showing where the good countryside is.

I am looking forward to taking my children to these spaces.

I am also looking forward to seeing the congregations of the mission partnership again. I had such a good reception from everyone when I preached with a view.

It is sad that the COVID-19 virus is stopping us from meeting physically at the moment.

I am looking forward to the time that I can start to get to meet you all again.

**Q3: What excites you about Missional Partnership Ministry?**

The Mission Partnership reminds me of the old District Councils that used to be part of the URC fabric. These were closed down before I aware of their existence. The Mission Partnership reminds me of those old DCs. The churches are close together and working together. I think that this is a real gift and I am looking forward to working with our churches.

**Q4: What are you most looking forward to in serving the Missional Partnership?**

I think that the Mission Partnership gives us all a chance to rediscover what church mission is all about. People are talking about getting used to the “new normal” after COVID.

The Mission Partnership gives us a chance – maybe our last chance – to rediscover the “new normal” that God originally introduced at Pentecost.

We are called to follow Jesus Christ, to announce the arrival of his kingdom and the calling and baptising of new disciples.

In a way, this is actually nothing new. God always intended to bring his light into the world.

Originally through Israel, and now the church joins in with that mission.

I am excited and keen to see how all of this takes shape in the Mission Partnership

**Q5: What hobbies do you have?**

I am a keen outdoors person and enjoy what I call “green time” – the opposite of screen time! I enjoy off road bicycle riding, walking and rough camping.

I am also a keen motorcycle rider and a member of the Christian Motorcycle Association. There is a sense of freedom and comradery within the bike scene that is worth its weight in gold.

**Q6: How can we best pray for you at this time?**

Prayers would be greatly appreciated for the family moving up to North Manchester. My boys need to find new schools and make new friends, and my wife Saskia will want to find work. Please pray that we can settle well – and quickly! – into the area.

I want to thank Daniel for being prepared to ask these questions so that we might start to get to know him better.

**I am now going to pray for Daniel and his family….**

Gracious God, thank you for your call on Daniel’s life to serve you as a minister within the URC.

I ask that you would pour out your blessings on him, Saskia and their two children.

We pray that the right schools for the children would be able to accommodate them. We pray that Saskia would find the right job and that that would be within your plan and purpose.

I pray that As Daniel begins his ministry in this period of lockdown that you would enable him to see your hand upon his ministry. We pray for the churches of our Missional Partnership that they may receive Daniel and be blessed and inspired by his ministry.

Pour out your Holy Spirit upon the family and may they know your loving embrace.

For we ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Bible Reading – Ephesians 3:14-21 (A prayer for the Ephesians)**

**14**For this reason I kneel before the Father, **15**from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. **16**I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, **17**so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, **18**may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, **19**and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

**20**Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, **21**to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Thanks be to God for His Word

**Sermon: “The Power of Prayer”**

Let us pray…Living and powerful God, fill us with your Holy Spirit and in that filling give us ears and hearts that are open to your Word contained in the pages of the Bible. Amen.

In 1984 – Jennifer Rush co-wrote a famous song…who knows the title of that song? It was called “The Power of Love” – a song covered by several artistes. It was a famous song and one that reached number 1 in the singles chart.

I am not aware that Jennifer Rush had the words of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 3:14-21 in mind when she wrote that song. But “Power” and “Love” permeate this passage from Paul’s letter to the Ephesian Church.

It is fair to say that this is a powerful prayer than Paul offers for his friends in the Ephesian Church.

In verse 14 – Paul writes (from Prison – not in comfort and luxury but from the chains that no doubt shackles him!)

**“For this reason, *I kneel* before the Father, 15 from whom his whole family derives its name.”** (Ephesians 3:14&15 - NIV) [italics mine]

In those times the normal posture for prayer was to stand…but here Paul, in acknowledging the power of God and in whose presence and name prayers are offered, kneels before the Father.

A sign of deep emotion, reverence and worship. Praying not for his own needs (despite prison) but for the needs of the Ephesian Christians!

Who aren’t just people “over there” or “those Christians in Ephesus” but people who are, for Paul, quite literally “family.” For the churches Paul established may be scattered in different parts of the known world…they may each have different challenges and problems to overcome…but they are all the family of God!

So whether we watch this as URC members, Methodists, Anglicans, Baptists, Pentecostals, Roman Catholics, non-denominational churches (and that list could go on)….we are, as we often refer to each other: ‘sisters and brothers in Christ’.

And Paul goes on to pray an askingly powerful prayer for the Ephesians – words that are worth hearing again:

**“16 I pray that our of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.””** (Ephesians 3:16-19 - NIV)

Again we hear the word “power” in verse 16. Paul prays that the Ephesian Christians would have the “power” (v18) to grasp how the powerful the “love” of Christ is:-

The love of Christ is **“wide”** = It covers all our experiences…whatever we have done in the past, whatever we are doing in the present and whatever we may do in the time before the power of Christ’s love for us is wide enough! Like the old Christian action songs says about the love of Jesus: “so wide you can’t get round it”

We cannot run from it….hide from it….ignore it or pretend it is not there! God’s love in Jesus, showed itself on the cross, with Jesus’ outstretched arms that are large enough and strong enough to embrace the whole of humanity! For the whole of our existence! For every moment we live on earth, God’s love is wide enough to embrace us all.

Paul continues the theme of Jesus’ love and prays that the Ephesian Christians would grasp how **“high”** *I don’t like heights…even if I did like heights, there is no mountain I could climb…not rocket it could go into space in that would get me over God’s love in Jesus Christ!* Likewise, nothing we experience in life no elation or happiness (highs of life) will allow us to beat the height of God’s love for his creation…you and me!

And the **“depth”** of God’s love for us in will never be surpassed! *When we went on honeymoon, I gave scuba diving a go! For some reason I fancied it. I have never been so deep in water as I was that day. I scared myself half to death mind you. But it was an experience I will never forget (and will probably never repeat either!)*

In life we sometimes endure depths of despair and desperation. Even in those moments when we might feel like there is nothing around us but the depths of the waters we face.

When we think we cannot breathe because of the pain we might feel (whether physical, emotional or spiritual) even then we cannot get away from God’s love!

Sometimes we try and hide in the depths….let’s not forget Jonah who ended up in the belly of fish to get away from God! Even then Jonah couldn’t hide from God!

The ultimate depth is death. Even then, God’s love for us doesn’t stop!
Scientists can get people into space, they can get rockets and scientific instruments far beyond where humans could possible go….humans and machinery can go to the depths….but God can go further!

We have to trust in God’s power and authority. Today, like never before in the situation the world finds itself in with Covid-19. Even this virus cannot and will not separate us from the love and power of God! And ultimately in prayer - the final words of this section tell us – they are words of praise (a “Doxology” to use a theological term)

For when we have brought all our requests and petitions to God…we can do no other but end with words of praise to the God who hears the prayers of our hearts…spoken or unspoken.

And it is God who should get the glory for all that He has done, is doing and will do for us His children, the family of His Church.

Friends may we never tire of praying for others and ourselves….but also we must never forget to be thankful that God answers prayer (not always in the way we might want).
And He deserves the praise and the glory now and forevermore.

Amen.

**Song: Give thanks with a grateful heart (x2)**

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| Give thanks with a grateful heart,give thanks to the Holy One;give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ, His Son. | And now let the weak say, 'I am strong',let the poor say, 'I am rich',because of what the Lord has done for us;and now let the weak say, 'I am strong',let the poor say, 'I am rich',because of what the Lord has done for us.*(repeat it twice)*  |
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**Prayers for others**

As we pray, Lord, let your peace surround us and let the worry and concerns of this day fall away from us as we think and pray for others.

Help us to trust your love, for you carry our sorrows and the sorrows of the world. Teach us to act and speak in the way that you want, giving us the wisdom to know when not to interfere as well as knowing when to speak and act. Calm our fears and let us be aware that all things are in your hands.

Lord, we pray for our families with all that worries and concerns us in their lives, may they be aware that they are always in our thoughts.

Lord, we pray for friends, those we are in contact with and those we are not.

Lord, we pray for our neighbours at home and at work and for the new neighbours we have found or who have found us during the lockdown. We are grateful for the help the care and the love we have received through them.

Lord, we pray for those we like and for those we dislike, help us to accept that each of us and all of us are part of your creation and therefore deserving of love.

Lord, we pray for those who mourn the passing of a loved one or a friend, comfort their troubled hearts and grant them your peace.

Lord, we pray for those who are ill or troubled in any way, either physically or mentally, may your healing touch bring them relief from their sufferings.

Lord, we pray for those who are lonely or sad. During the last weeks and months we have all been deprived of that physical contact that make our lives special. We pray that the restrictions will soon be lifted so that once again we can touch and speak with our loved ones and friends face to face.

Lord, we pray for all those that our thoughts go to each day, especially those affected by Covid 19. We pray for those in care homes and in hospitals, those isolated in their own homes or in other places. We are especially thankful for the care and treatments provided by our NHS and staff in care homes. We hold in our prayers, them, all key workers and all who have improved or enabled us to continue to live our lives by shopping for us or contacting us in many and varied ways.

Lord, we thank you for the blessings you have given us and ask that you will strengthen us to walk in the way where you lead us. Help us to remember the love of Jesus shown to us on the cross and to accept the new life and love and freedom that knowing Jesus offers to us.

Grant us the grace to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can change and the wisdom to know the difference.

We place all our anxieties for ourselves and others at the foot of your cross as we offer these and all our prayers in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Final Song: Love divine all loves excelling**

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| 1..Love divine, all loves excelling,joy of heaven to earth come down:fix in us Thy humble dwelling,all Thy faithful mercies crown.Jesus, Thou art all compassion,pure, unbounded love Thou art;visit us with Thy salvation,enter every trembling heart.  | 2..Breathe, O breathe Thy loving Spiritinto every troubled breast;let us all in Thee inherit,let us find Thy promised rest. Take away the love of sinning,Alpha and Omega be;end of faith, as its beginning,set our hearts at liberty.  |
| 3..Come, almighty to deliver,let us all Thy grace receive;suddenly return, and never,never more Thy temples leave.Thee we would be always blessing,serve Thee as Thy hosts above,pray, and praise Thee without ceasing,glory in Thy perfect love.  | 4..Finish then Thy new creation,pure and spotless let us be;let us see Thy great salvation,perfectly restored in Thee:changed from glory into glory,till in heaven we take our place, till we cast our crowns before Thee,lost in wonder, love, and praise.  |
| Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788) ccli 169737 Streaming Licence 595811  |

**Blessing:**

I invite you to hold out your hands as we seek God’s blessing upon us:

Gracious God, may we be held in your loving arms. And as we hold our hands out I pray that you would pour out your love, mercy and blessing upon each one of us.

May we be blessed by and filled with the presence of God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, Amen.