**Service of Worship – Sunday 26th September 2021**

Hello everyone, My name is David Watson, I am a serving Elder in the United Reformed Church. I welcome you all to our service today which is from Bamford Chapel and Norden United Reformed Church, Rochdale. Our church is part of the Rochdale, Bury and North Manchester Missional Partnership

Call to worship

Lord, we seek to meet you through praise and prayer. Let our praise be prayer and our prayer be praise. So Lord, may your words be on our lips and your praise in our hearts as we gather in your name to worship you and to seek your will for us collectively and as individuals.

We begin our worship as we sing our first hymn,

**1 CMP A new commandment I give unto you**

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| A new commandment I give unto you,  that you love one another as I have loved you,  that you love one another as I have loved you.  By this shall all men know that you are My disciples,  if you have love one for another.  By this shall all men know  that you are My disciples,  if you have love one for another. | Roy Crabtree  Ccli 169737  Streaming licence 595811 |

**A story for the Children (of all ages)**

Have you ever flown a kite?

This is a story of a boy who was flying a kite. It was a wonderful day for flying a kite, the wind was blowing just right and as the boy started he had no difficulty in getting the kite up in the air. The kite pulled steadily and the boy let out the string and soon it was almost a speck in the sky it was flying so high. There weren’t many clouds in the sky but as it happened one of them came overhead and at that point the kite was hidden from view above the cloud.

A friend of the boy came along and asked him what he was doing and the boy answered that he was flying his kite. His friend looked up and couldn’t see the kite and he said, “How do you know that your kite is still there when you can’t see it?” The boy answered, “I may not be able to see it but I know that it is still there because it keeps tugging at the string wanting me to let some more out so that it can fly higher. I love my kite very much and I don’t want to lose it, so I am not going to let it get any further from me, and I can always reel in the string and bring it back if I want to.”

We are sometimes like a kite, we want to be allowed more string, or more rope, so that we can do exactly what we want to do, even though it is not always best for us. Those who love us very much, our parents, our teachers, our friends and of course God, are the ones who will reel in our string and stop us from doing wrong things. That may be by saying no to us when we want to do something, or by telling us to do things when we are enjoying ourselves with a game. Like when it is time to go to school or go to bed.

God does it through a thing inside us, called a conscience, that tells us when something we are about to do or are doing is wrong or not quite right.

God loves us so much that he doesn’t want to lose us. He keeps hold of us, even though we can’t see him and even when we try to pull away. And it doesn’t matter how young or how old we are, he loves us all our lives and wants what is best for us.

**Prayers**

Loving God, we praise and thank you for your coming to us in Jesus, walking our earth and sharing our humanity. We praise and thank you for the inspiration you give us through him; the knowledge that he experienced temptation, just as we do, yet refused to compromise, staying true to his chosen path despite the awful cost. We praise and thank you for the revelation of your purpose throughout his earthly ministry. We remember how he taught the multitude, instructed his disciples and interpreted the law; how he healed the sick, responded to the needy and cared for the poor; how he confronted injustice, challenged oppression and overcame evil. We praise and thank you for the supreme demonstration of your grace at Calvary; the fact that you were willing to identify yourself with us not only in life but also in death, enduring the agony of the crucifixion, and the awful burden of our sinfulness. Loving God we come to recall your goodness, to marvel at your grace and to commit ourselves to your service. For the wonder of your love, **we praise and thank you**. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

A prayer of Confession

Loving god, once more we have failed you, once more we seek your pardon. Forgive us that, like your people across the ages, we are all too human, our spirits willing but our flesh weak, our intentions good, but our living up to them poor, our commitment real, but our discipleship all too often false. Forgive us that though you speak to us day by day, though you challenge us through your word, though your voice is there for all who are ready to hear it, repeatedly we have been slow to listen. Forgive us that though you have tried to lead us back to you; disciplining us in love, gently correcting our mistakes, we have wilfully rejected your guidance. Forgive us that though you have always been faithful, never letting us down, constant in your care, we have been unfaithful in so much. Forgive us that though you are worthy of all praise, though you and you alone hold the key to life, and though each day you draw near to us, many times we have not made time for you. Loving God, help us recognise our faults and, with your help, to turn from them, so that we may be the people that you would have us be. Through your grace, **have mercy.** In the name of Jesus. Amen.

**THE LORD’S PRAYER**

Our Father, who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name;

thy kingdom come;

thy will be done;

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,

for ever and ever. Amen.

In church our children will leave during the singing of our next hymn, we pray that they will enjoy their separate time with each other as we continue by singing,

**152 CMP For the beauty of the earth**

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| 1.. For the beauty of the earth,  for the beauty of the skies,  for the love which from our birth  over and around us lies;  Father unto You we raise  this our sacrifice of praise. | 2.. For the beauty of each hour  of the day and of the night,  hill and vale, and tree and flower,  sun and moon, and stars of light;  Father unto You we raise  this our sacrifice of praise. |
| 3.. For the joy of love from God  that we share on earth below;  for our friends and family  and the love that they can show;  Father unto You we raise  this our sacrifice of praise. | 4.. For each perfect gift divine  to our race so freely given,  thank You Lord that they are mine,  here on earth as gifts from heaven;  Father unto You we raise  this our sacrifice of praise. |
| Folliott Pierpoint altered © 1986 Horrobin/Leavers ccli 169737 Streaming licence 595811 | |

If we come to church we may place our offerings on the plate at the back as we come in or go out; or, we may give regularly through our banks. However we give we ask God to bless our gifts as we pray;

**Offertory prayer**

Lord, all that we have comes from you. Our time and our talents and our treasure, and we thank you for all that you bless us with each day of our lives. We bring these gifts and ourselves as a token of our appreciation for all that we have received from you. Bless them and bless us and use the gifts and us to further the advancement of your kingdom in this place and elsewhere.

Amen.

**Our first reading is: James 5:13-20 (NIVUK) - The prayer of faith**

**13**Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. **14**Is anyone among you ill? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. **15**And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. **16**Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

**17**Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. **18**Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

**19**My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, **20**remember this: whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

**Our second reading is: Mark 9:38-50 - Whoever is not against us is for us**

38‘Teacher,’ said John, ‘we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.’

39‘Do not stop him,’ Jesus said. ‘For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, 40for whoever is not against us is for us. 41Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.

**Causing to stumble**

42‘If anyone causes one of these little ones – those who believe in me – to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung round their neck and they were thrown into the sea. 43If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. 45And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. 47And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, 48where

‘“the worms that eat them do not die,  
    and the fire is not quenched.

49Everyone will be salted with fire.

50‘Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other.’

**Our next hymn is - CMP 165 Give me a heart that will love the unlovely**

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| 1.. Give me a heart that will love the unlovely,  open my eyes to the needy and lost,  help me, O Lord, to show Your love in action,  give, without counting the cost,  give, without counting the cost. | 2.. Help me remember I'm empty without You,  help me to find the strength  only in You.  I can give nothing unless You first fill me,  Your love alone must shine through,  Your love alone must shine through. |
| 3.. Make me be willing to go where You send me,  make me be ready to answer Your call.  Give me a heart that rejoices to serve You,  sharing the best love of all,  sharing the best love of all. | © 1988 Gillian E Hutchinson  Ccli 169737  Streaming licence 595811 |

**Address**

We live in a world that inundates us with extravagant claims and offers usually ending in the word, ‘and only’, so much per day, per week or per month. The timescale that they apply is the one that will sound most attractive. Our televisions, newspapers and magazines blast us with products that will give us, more manageable hair, cleaner clothes, whiter teeth or tastier food, all for only a few pounds. We can win ‘life changing’ sums of money for the cost of a telephone call. Cars, perfume, deodorants, and all the other things that will guarantee to bring us happiness, friends, and the good life are available to us providing we can stump up the cash for them. And it’s not always our money. We are in the conference season and the politicians will be promising the earth to get more supporters. And each rival party will note every comma and fullstop so that they can pounce when an election promise is broken, so long as it is not one of theirs! And the media ….well ….

But talk is cheap, even if some of the products on offer aren’t, and we soon come to realise that political promises and those offered by the advertising media are not always what they are cracked up to be, often hollow and sometimes downright untrue. Are we Christians any better? We too also make great claims, “Jesus is the answer!” “Believe in God!” “Follow me to church and find out how to lead a more fulfilling life!” But do our lives reflect this? Are we guilty of giving the lie to what we profess by the way we live? Do we have all the right answers available to us yet contradict the gospel by our lives?

When Saint Helens rugby league club played at Knowsley Road there was a small chapel nearby that had a wayside pulpit notice that read, ‘Saints over there, sinners in here’. What we have to acknowledge is that we need help and that we also need to help each other.

James’ letter is worth reading in its entirety, because, in it, he gives a lot of practical advice that, if followed, will surely bring about changes to our lives that will be truly ‘life changing’ for ourselves and others. He begins by exhorting Christians to act justly in society. He gives practical advice on the relationship between faith and actions. He tells us the importance of controlling our tongues and the consequences of not doing so. He encourages his readers to turn from evil desires and to obey God. He finishes off in chapter five by pleading with his readers to be patient with each other, to be straight forward in their promises, to help each other be faithful to God and, to pray at every opportunity. In our reading, in verses 13 to 16, James tells us to pray, when in trouble; pray when happy; pray when sick; and pray when needing to be forgiven. This praying is not just for oneself but for each other. People in the church are not alone. All members of Christ’s body should be able to count on others for support and prayer, especially when they are sick or suffering. The church should stay alert to be aware of and to pray for the needs of its members. He says that the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. In verses 17 and 18, he summarises the story of Elijah and the three year drought, recorded in 1 Kings chapter 17, in order to demonstrate this.

One thing we must remember though is that faith, either that of the person praying or that of the person needing prayer, does not heal. The one who heals is God, even though our prayers are part of the healing process, and, the if and when of healing is subject to God’s will not our desire. The Christian’s most powerful resource is communicating with God through prayer and, Jesus, through his death and resurrection, has made it possible for us to go directly to God. God’s power is so infinitely greater than ours that it only makes sense to rely on that power. Prayer is not a last resort, something to try when all else fails, it is a must for all occasions.

Our reading from Mark’s gospel begins with something that often is thrown at ‘Church’ as a reason for not going. The disciples were jealous of a man who had healed in Jesus’ name because they were more concerned about their own group’s position than in helping to free those possessed by demons. We are guilty of similar things in the church today when, for example, we refuse to participate in worthy causes because other people or groups are not affiliated to our denomination; or, those projects do not involve the kind of people with whom we feel most comfortable; or maybe our efforts won’t receive enough recognition.

Today, denominational hierarchy can influence and even prevent things that will benefit the local congregations because they think that they may lose control of assets that belong to ‘their’ church.

Can you imagine a situation where a church receives a legacy of around £400,000 which could be used to benefit the whole village but the problems that seemed at times insurmountable were, for example, who would own a property built with that money on another denomination’s land? Or, two churches who agreed that it made sense to join together but were unable to agree which of the churches should be renovated and whose money should be used to do so.

Jesus never had a church or a synagogue that he ‘belonged’ to so his answer to the disciples was very simple. “Do not stop him,” Jesus said, “No-one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me. For whoever is not against us is for us.” Jesus was not saying that being indifferent or neutral to him was as good as being committed. He was simply pointing out that neutrality towards him is not possible. However, his followers will not all resemble each other or belong to the same groups. People who are on Jesus’ side have the same goal of building up the kingdom of God and they should not let their differences interfere with this goal. Those who share a common faith in Christ should co-operate. People don’t have to be just like us to be following Jesus with us. Wouldn’t it be good if all we Christians adopted this attitude.

When the disciples raised this problem with Jesus they interrupted him because he was rebuking them so maybe they wanted to change the subject. The group had been travelling and had reached Capernaum. When they were in the house, Jesus asked them what they had been arguing about as they travelled. The disciples kept quiet because, on the way, they had argued about who was the greatest. Jesus sat down and called the twelve to him and told them, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.” To emphasise this he took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking the child in his arms he said, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”

In spite of the interruption Jesus carried on to complete his point. He continued, “And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied round his neck.” This caution against harming little ones can equally apply to little ones in the faith and applies to what we do individually as teachers, as examples and also to what we allow to fester in our Christian fellowship. It is so easy to look around and see things that others are not doing and be upset by them. Jesus has said, ‘Take the log out of your own eye and then you can see the speck in another’s eye.’

In the examples that Jesus uses in verses 43 to 47 about cutting off a hand or foot and plucking out an eye, Jesus is using language that stresses the importance of cutting sin out of our lives. Disciplining ourselves can be painful and could involve giving up a relationship, or something we may be doing or a habit that is against God’s will. Jesus is saying that our high goal is worth it and that nothing should stand in the way of our faith.

In the final part of our reading Jesus says we should have salt in ourselves. Salt seasons and flavours and we Christians should make a difference to the flavour of the world we live in just as salt changes the flavour of meat. And we Christians should counteract the moral decay in society just as salt can preserve food from decay.

I must admit that I find all this very difficult to take in and so I reminded myself of the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples and which is the prayer that we use in our services and perhaps some of us use daily. The prayer we call the Lord’s Prayer. In Matthew chapter 6 verse 10 we read, ‘Thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.’ I asked myself, ‘What is God’s will for us?’ and I was led again to John chapter 3 verses 16 & 17. Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

Believe in Jesus. This is a starting point, but it is not blind faith. As James reminds us, if we have faith it will change us and good deeds will follow as sure as night follows day. James also reminds us that we are not alone, we are able through prayer to be part of a worldwide movement praying together and for each other. We also have the Holy Spirit to guide us and to guard us. When you think of it we have a lot going for us. We still only scratch the surface as individual churches and even as churches together, but we have to start somewhere. What a difference we would make if we all did as much as we could **in** our own individual churches and that then spilled over into and across the denominations. That really could be life changing.

Amen

**Our next hymn is; 400 CMP Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us**

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| 1.. Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us  o'er the world's tempestuous sea;  guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us -  for we have no help but Thee,  yet possessing every blessing,  if our God our Father be. | 2.. Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us:  all our weakness Thou dost know:  Thou didst tread this earth before us,  Thou didst feel its keenest woe;  lone and dreary, faint and weary,  through the desert Thou didst go. |
| 3.. Spirit of our God, descending,  fill our hearts with heavenly joy,  love with every passion blending,  pleasure that can never cloy;  thus provided, pardoned, guided,  nothing can our peace destroy. | James Edmeston  Ccli 169737  Streaming licence 595811 |

**Prayers for our world and for others**

Almighty and everlasting God, we do not always know what to ask for in our prayers for there is so much that we do not know or understand, yet we know that you are active in our world, moving in human hearts and in the events of history to fulfil your purpose. So we come now to you, and, in our quiet faith, we place ourselves and our world into your hands, asking that your will may be done, despite everything that conspires against it. We bring ourselves, weak, faithless, hesitant, and foolish. We bring all we are and all we long to be, seeking your help and your transforming touch. We bring those who are part of our lives; family and friends, neighbours and colleagues at work, all those whom we meet in the daily round of life. We bring our world, the rich and poor, powerful and weak, well fed and hungry, healthy and sick; We pray for those needing your healing touch and name them before you now in a few moments of silence ………; these that we name and others that we hold in our hearts we lift up to you; those who enjoy peace and those who endure war, those who revel in freedom and those who fight for justice; we pray for all people affected by natural disasters like earthquake and tsunami and we pray for the people of Haitii, the Middle East, Afghanistan and all the troubled parts of our world. Almighty and everlasting God, we thank you that you are involved in our lives, active in our world and concerned about everything you have made. We rejoice that you hold all things ultimately in your hands. And so we leave them confidently with you, asking only this, ‘your will be done, your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.’ All things are yours; **we entrust them into your keeping.** Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Our final hymn is: 746 CMP What a friend we have in Jesus**

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| 1.. What a Friend we have in Jesus,  all our sins and griefs to bear!  What a privilege to carry,  everything to God in prayer!  Oh, what peace we often forfeit,  Oh, what needless pain we bear-  all because we do not carry  everything to God in prayer! | 2.. Have we trials and temptations?  Is there trouble anywhere?  We should never be discouraged:  take it to the Lord in prayer!  Can we find a friend so faithful,  who will all our sorrows share?  Jesus knows our every weakness;  take it to the Lord in prayer. |
| 3.. Are we weak and heavy laden,  cumbered with a load of care?  Precious Saviour, still our refuge!  Take it to the Lord in prayer.  Do Thy friends despise forsake Thee?  Take it to the Lord in prayer!  In His arms He'll take and shield Thee,  thou wilt find a solace there. | Joseph M. Scriven  Ccli 169737  Streaming licence 595811 |

**Benediction**

The blessing of the God, present from the dawning of Creation,

**be with us**.

The blessing of the Son, who encircles us in the protection of his presence,

**be with us.**

And the blessing of the Spirit, who invites us to renew adventures in faith,

**be** **with us, yesterday, today and forever. AMEN**

**The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and evermore, Amen**