



Faith – Hope – Love – Since 1972



Reflecting on our Jubilee
A Small Group Study Series

The URC celebrates its 50th birthday in October 2022. To mark this various writers have contributed to a series of readings, reflections, and prayers which will be distributed through the Daily Devotions email list every morning over the first two weeks of October. Some of these reflections have been used to provide these small group study sessions which will encourage us to reflect, give thanks, and rise to the challenge of being part of the URC in the 21st Century. Each session involves hymns from a variety of URC writers to help us reflect.

Session 3 Some Challenges

Hymn

Living God, your joyful Spirit

Jill Jenkins 1937 – c2020 Tune: RS sets this to Abbots Leigh but the Rev'd Malcolm Fife has written another tune to it which can be found online – see the notes at the end of this session.

Living God, your joyful Spirit
breaks the bounds of time & space,
rests in love upon your people,
drawn together in this place.
Here we join in glad thanksgiving,
here rejoice to pray and praise:
Lord of all our past traditions,
Lord of all our future days.

2: As your bread may we be broken,
scattered in community;
we who know your greatest blessings
called to share Christ's ministry.
May we gently lead each other,
share our hunger and our thirst;
learn that only through our weakness
shall we know the strength of Christ.

3: Lord, when we grow tired of giving,
feel frustration, hurt and strain,
by your Spirit's quiet compulsion,
draw us back to you again.
Guide us through the bitter searching
when our confidence is lost;
give us hope from desolation,
arms outstretched upon a cross.

4: Living God, your power surrounds us,
as we face the way Christ trod,
challenge us to fresh commitment
to the purposes of God:
called to share a new creation,
called to preach a living word,
promised all the joys of heaven,
through the grace of Christ our Lord.

1 Corinthians 14. 26-40

When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged. And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets, for God is a God not of disorder but of peace.

(As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached?)

Anyone who claims to be a prophet, or to have spiritual powers, must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. Anyone who does not recognize this is not to be recognized. So, my friends, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues; but all things should be done decently and in order.

Reflection

Questions

- How has the ordained ministry of women been a blessing to you?
- How should we deal with difficult passages in the Bible such as this one from 1 Corinthians?
- What might we mean when we say of the URC: *It acknowledges the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments, discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as the supreme authority for the faith and conduct of all God's people.*

Basis of Union para 12

Prayer

Spirit of God, you keep calling people to preach and teach,
to pray and prophesy,
to serve and reach out in all forms of ministry
and build your Church.

We thank you that your call is inclusive and wide-reaching.

You reach out to people regardless of their gender, race, age or education,
their life experience, gifts or other plans.

Renew us as we respond afresh to your call, now and always. Amen

Hymn O God of Earth and Altar

G. K. Chesterton (1874 - 1936) R&S 346 Tune: King's Lynn

O God of earth and altar,
bow down and hear our cry,
our earthly rulers falter,
our people drift and die;
the walls of gold entomb us,
the swords of scorn divide,
take not thy thunder from us,
but take away our pride.

2: From all that terror teaches,
from lies of tongue and pen,
from all the easy speeches
that comfort cruel men,
from sale and profanation
of honour and the sword,
from sleep and from damnation,
deliver us, good Lord!

3: Tie in a living tether the prince and priest and thrall,
bind all our lives together, smite us and save us all;
in ire and exultation aflame with faith, and free,
lift up a living nation, a single sword to thee.

Acts 5. 27-32

When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, saying, We gave you strict orders not to teach in his name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man's blood on us." But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority." The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."

Reflection

Questions

- Given we live in an increasingly secular age in the UK, does it matter that there are still 26 Church of England bishops in the House of Lords and that the government has a role in appointing bishops and other senior clerics? (If it does matter – why, if it doesn't – why not?)
- Politicians don't like it when the Church criticises the State – most recently the churches critiqued government plans to send asylum seekers to Rwanda. Should the Church mind its own business when it comes to politics?
- Should churches be active in local politics as well as around national and international issues? If so how might your church share its views and be active in local issues?

Prayer

Ever-living and ever-loving God,
You sent your Son to bring us truth
And your Spirit to make us holy
May we be faithful witnesses to Jesus Christ,
That your name may be great among the nations. Amen

A Hymn for Refugees

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See them line the dusty pathways,
burdened with the pains of life.
Walking from their ruined homeland,
memories shattered left behind.
God, we see your tears & suffering
in the child, the youth the aged;
Open now the gates of Justice!
Open now the gates of Love!

2: As we watch and see your people,
Stranger in a stranger land.
Searching for a liberation,
yearning for an outstretched hand.
Now comes death and then refusal,
What will bar our way to peace?
Open now the gates of Welcome!
Open now the gates of Grace!

3: Christ we see your face among them, give acceptance one and all.
No more questions, no more queries, move our hearts to stop their fall.
Spirit, help us lift your people, carry loads too hard to bear.
Open now the gates of Heaven! Open now the gates of Hope !

St Matthew 16: 13 - 20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Reflection

Questions

- How are decisions made in your local congregation? Is your Church Meeting lively, engaging and a key part of your church life or moribund and boring or something in between?
- What might you do to make your Church Meetings (even) better?

Prayer

Jesus, Messiah, Son of the Living God

We join in Peter's affirmation but shrink at Peter's responsibility.

We rejoice in freedom from State control but wonder about our structures.

As the United Reformed Church continues to evolve:

give us honesty about who holds the keys;

give us wisdom about who should hold the keys;

give us creativity in matching aspiration with reality.

Make us the people who help others access the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

Hymn Writers

Jill Jenkins was a member of Palmers' Green URC and her hymn, *Living God Your Joyful Spirit* was included in Rejoice and Sing at 530 and set to the tune Abbots Leigh. The Rev'd Anne Sardeson's forthcoming book *Fifty Hymns for Fifty Years* suggests a different tune written by URC minister Malcolm Fife which draws out the deeply reflective and spiritual nature of the hymn. You can hear this version here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5li2nef1rw>

Gilbert Keith Chesterton (29 May 1874 – 14 June 1936) was an English writer, philosopher, lay theologian, and literary and art critic. Chesterton created the fictional priest-detective Father Brown, and wrote on apologetics. Chesterton routinely referred to himself as an "orthodox" Christian, and came to identify this position more and more with Catholicism, eventually converting to Roman Catholicism from high church Anglicanism. His one hymn is in Rejoice and Sing.

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