

**Sheffield United Reformed Churches**  
**Team Ministry worship for individuals or a family**  
**Sunday 29th August 2021 at 10:30 am.**

**Call to worship**

We are invited to take a precious moment from all that occupies our minds and our days,  
To rest in the presence of the Lord and to focus on God's precious word for us,  
Individually, as local communities of faith and in the Sheffield Team Ministry.

Let us open our ears and open our minds,  
That the life-enhancing and life-transforming good news may be heard, that we might respond well.  
Let us listen for the word of the Lord!

**Hymn**

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here;  
Come bow before him now with reverence and fear:  
In him no sin is found - we stand on holy ground.  
Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here.

Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around;  
He burns with holy fire, with splendour he is crowned:  
How awesome is the sight - our radiant King of light!  
Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.

Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place;  
He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister his grace -  
No work too hard for him. In faith receive from him.  
Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place

**Opening Prayer**

God our Creator, source of life,  
Your power has been at work throughout the countless years of time and space  
And yet that same power has given us this new day.  
Let us come, with thanks giving in our hearts and praise the Lord who has given us this day.  
The gift of life, light and freedom.

God of us all, as a church, as a family, we come together and ask that you send your Spirit  
To open our eyes and hearts once more to your word.  
We give you glory as we celebrate your unique beauty and your gracious presence in all creation.

May we live this day in praise, knowing our origins in your love, our source in your creating and our  
future in your hands.

God challenges us, God encourages us. God confronts us, and God accepts us and give us  
eyes, hearts, souls, and minds to focus on your love rather than rituals.

We pray for your help where we face challenges, and for your guidance where we have barriers to  
overcome. We leave the busyness of our lives as we anticipate the next stage coming out of lock down.  
Open our ears to hear your word and draw us closer to you, that the whole world may be one with you  
as you are one with us in Jesus Christ our Lord.

As we come, together (yet apart), we come in the love which unifies us.  
Yet we admit that we are at time strangers to your truth. God forgives us: for Christ is the Way - When  
we have not supported one another in love, or protected those that are vulnerable.

**Cleanse our hearts and make us pure.** God who forgives, accept the cry of our hearts.  
To all who repent and turn to Christ, he says 'Your sins are forgiven'.  
Hear our prayers and the meditation of our hearts as we come now to worship.

## Readings



**Psalm 15** - Who may live in God's presence?

**Song of Solomon 2:8-13** - God's love brings forth new life...

**Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23** - Evil comes from within, not from outside...

**James 1:17-27** - We are the first-fruits of God's creative love. So let's listen and live it out...

## Reflection

I grew up in a very big Victorian council house full of people. Me, my two brothers, sister, two step sisters (and one of them had a husband there too), my parents, my granddad, and as the years passed, some would move out, new spouses would move in and babies would arrive. It was never a quiet home. I spent most of my teenage years, with headphones on listening to music, just to escape the noise of so many voices competing with each other. I can't tell you how much I loved getting my own home – peace and quiet at last. And I often wondered if anyone ever listened to anything anyone else said in the family home. It always seemed like lots of totally independent one-sided conversations.

I like to watch people when I am on holiday, or out in a coffee shop or a pub. So many people seem not to be remotely interested in the conversations of the people they are with. Often couples seem to have two unrelated conversations – or one talks and the other ignores the conversation apart from an occasional, "Yes, dear".

So I wonder how good we are at listening. When I trained to be a RELATE counsellor and then a CRUSE counsellor, I realised that listening is not easy. You have to work at it. And sometimes part of the skill of listening involves hearing what hasn't been said. I like Zoom meetings but there is a danger in missing the body language that often speaks louder than words.

When I was having a bad time some years ago before training for ministry, my church pastoral visitor was round all the time. And she thought she was a great visitor – a real chatterbox – but she never listened, so she never heard what I wanted her to hear and pray about. The most moving time I've had as a minister was sitting with someone in silence as they just cried following a major upheaval in their life. No words – just tears – but I and God heard so clearly all the pain coming out. She felt heard. And healing began. The person often spoke of that day and said I gave such good advice, but I hardly said a word – I just listened and prayed. The thing about listening is that it is not a simple skill. Sometimes it is possible to listen but not really hear what someone is saying trying to say. Real listening requires humility and grace.

The book of James addresses the idea that Christian discipleship requires action. Although our faith is not based on works, the complete picture of what it means to be a Christian, a disciple, includes action on our part. But how do we know what God wants us to be doing if we don't listen? In my experience, most of us, including me, find it much easier to form our own opinions than to listen to God and discern God's will. Which is probably a big part of why many churches are struggling at the moment.

Our passage today from James specifically addresses this issue and sets the framework for the rest of James's theological perspective. The first chapter of James begins like many early Christian epistles. James encourages the believers to stand firm amid persecution. This is a common theme in the New Testament epistles as many first-century Christians experienced persecution first-hand. Then the epistle deals with the importance of really listening to the word. Verse 19 begins with an admonition to be quick to listen and slow to speak and to anger. There is perhaps no wiser practical verse in all scripture. The human tendency is to do just the opposite, it seems. Verse 22 continues with instruction not merely to listen but actually to do what the word says. "Doing" is an important concept in James. For James, listening and even knowing what it right is not enough. You must take your listening and then do something about it. In verse 26, the writer again cautions against the dangers of the tongue.

We do not know much about James's situation or audience, but they must have been experiencing a reality that many churches experience. Outside persecution and indifference can threaten a church, but inner strife, often caused by untamed tongues, can damage the church. There is nothing more depressing than attending a meeting in a church and hearing lots of strong opinions, firmly expressed, and nobody listening to those who disagree, and nobody even attempting to listen to God. Yet that situation is tragically not uncommon, especially in failing churches. What an important message for the church today! Listen to God!

Listen! Don't bully people with your views, don't tell God what to do. Listen! Listen for God's word which may be in the view that you are ungraciously dismissing. We have ears for a reason – perhaps we should all use our tongues a little less and our ears more. I have often thought that verse 19 should be etched above the doorway at the entry to every worship area. There is not a better attitude for Christian living than that! Listen graciously with an open mind and a love-filled heart. Listen!

Most church crises that I have observed (and I've seen a few) have occurred because some people were talking much more than listening. It is impossible to talk and listen at the same time. If we spend all of our time talking and telling people what we think and what we think THEY should think, then we probably will not hear God's word for us.

No-one wants to be in a relationship with someone who will not listen. When we fail to listen and do God's will, we often fail to follow God's important command to love one another in the way that Christ loved us. One of the things I will be interested in as I visit the team churches is how much love I see on display, how much grace and humility, how much listening to God rather than strong human opinions. I'm sure I won't be disappointed.

The message of James for us personally is the same message that is preached again and again and again! Listen! Listen to God! Listen for God who may well be speaking to you through others, even the person you don't normally listen to. Listen for God in the sermon, in the prayer, in the hymn, in the bible, in the communion, in the chat with a neighbour, a fellow disciple or even a stranger. Listen! Listen for God in the elderly, the children and all those in between. Listen for God in the church and outside.

All too often prayer is telling God what we want – but prayer should be listening too, working out what God wants. God's will is unlikely to be done if all we do is tell God what we think. Because we do not have the wisdom of God. A bad Church Meeting is one in which people talk over each other. A good Church Meeting is one in which people listen to each other, with grace and love. A bad church is one where the people with big voices try to dominate or get their human way, which is often unwittingly opposing God with resistance to moving where God leads. A good church is one where people pray for guidance and listen to God, and then, having discerned God's will go for it, trusting God.

To really listen, we must learn to control our tongues. This is an important discipline of our faith. Tongues can hurt and bully other people, hurt God and damage our relationship with people and with God. But when we learn to listen, we learn to use our tongues more effectively, in the way God wants them used.

James encourages believers that taking an active role in our faith is imperative. We must act on the word, and put our calling as Christians in motion. Going to church and then doing nothing with your faith is pointless! Faith is about listening, trusting, doing, being and commitment. So, let's all listen and do what God asks us to do, as individuals, as local churches and as a people called by God to be a team in Sheffield! Then, and only then, with grace and humility, will we discover the joy of living in forward-looking and outward-looking faith. Amen.

### **Hymn**

Speak, O Lord, as we come to You to receive the food of your holy word.  
Take Your truth, plant it deep in us; shape and fashion us in Your likeness,  
That the light of Christ might be seen today in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.  
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us all Your purposes, for Your glory.

Teach us Lord full obedience, Holy reverence, true humility.  
Test our thoughts and our attitudes in the radiance of Your purity.  
Cause our faith to rise; cause our eyes to see, Your majestic love and authority.  
Words of power that can never fail; let their truth prevail over unbelief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds; help us grasp the heights of Your plans for us.  
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time that will echo down through eternity.  
And by grace we'll stand on Your promises; and by faith we'll walk as You walk with us.  
Speak, O Lord, 'til your church is built and the earth is filled with Your glory.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

We thank you for your church where we find the deepest expression of devotion to you, your children and your creation. We are sorry that we fail to honour one another above ourselves. Stir up our zeal that we might know your direction and serve you with passion as you show us the new things to which you are leading us

God for the world you created, we ask for your help to be good stewards of this world. May we re-double our efforts to bring about a change in the climate and to re-address the damage which we have caused? We remember the people of Haiti, the USA, Afghanistan, Israel & Palestine, and

Give us compassion, in our efforts and in our work. God of justice we lift before all the injustices which have come to light, the treatment of women and children, the increase in the levels of violence, those who continue to be held in slavery.

Lord, you walk alongside us and listen - so hear our prayers for all who are suffering and in pain at this time, those dying and those grieving, those who are sick and those caring. Strengthen the patience for whom this has just been another day, a repetition of yesterday and of the day before. Fill them with the promise that each day is a promise from you.

Help your Church be a family where the deepest hurts and disappointments can be shared without judgement. Help every one of your people find a true friend within your family so that the barriers of loneliness may be broken and we, in our turn, may listen to the pain of the world with love and compassion.

God who hears and answers prayers, make us instruments of your justice, channels of your love until our human family is at peace and lives in the unity of your grace.

### **Closing Hymn – R&S 523**

Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising, Give me joy in my heart, I pray;  
Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising, Keep me praising till the break of day:

*Sing hosanna, sing hosanna, Sing hosanna to the King of kings.  
Sing hosanna, sing hosanna, Sing hosanna to the King.*

Give me peace in my heart, keep me loving, Give me peace in my heart, I pray;  
Give me peace in my heart, keep me loving, Keep me loving till the break of day:

*Sing hosanna...*

Give me love in my heart, keep me serving, Give me love in my heart, I pray;  
Give me love in my heart, keep me serving, Keep me serving till the break of day:

*Sing hosanna...*

### **Blessing**

So let us go into the world, knowing that God shares the journey with us; knowing that God will guide us and strengthen us; that God will lift us when we stumble and

Bless us with all we need to be God's disciples.

Let us go and live a confident, Spirit-enthused, gracious, loving and hope-filled faith as good disciples, Individually and together.

And may God's rich and powerful blessing be upon us, upon all whom we love, and upon all whom God asks us to love. Amen!