

Synod Sunday – 29/05/22

Introduction

Croeso i ddydd Sul Synod Cymru. Welcome to our United Reformed Church Wales Synod Sunday worship. The idea grew from feedback at the October 2020 Synod Meeting where there were suggestions about more opportunities to connect people across the Synod. The idea of recording a service for when there is a fifth Sunday in the month came from a local church minister, and this is the fruit.

Sharing in this service reminds us of our different circles of belonging in the church: from local, to synod, to being part of the body of Christ through space and time. This service can be part of local church worship, shared as part of local on-line worship or projected on a screen for a congregation meeting in a building. It can also be viewed by households on the Synod YouTube channel. You can use all of it or part of it, but may it help us to give thanks to God and find energy for being partners in God's work in the world. May it help us to feel part of something beyond ourselves.

The May 2022 service has been planned and prepared by the Synod Support team. These are the people who work on behalf of the Synod as an organisation to support the churches in the synod as a geographical area covering the nation of Wales.

In the lead up to the synod Big Day Out in Builth Wells on 25th June, we picked the theme of celebrating the 50th anniversary of the URC, loosely following the idea of a birthday party, and using one of the Bible readings that a lot of churches will be hearing, along with thoughts about the Biblical idea of jubilee. You're all invited!

Call to worship

Welcome the celebration has already begun, Jesus says, 'People will come from east and west, north and south, and eat in the Kingdom of God' (Luke 13:29)

Hymn - Celebrate and Sing

Come on and celebrate
His gift of love, we will celebrate
The Son of God who loved us
And gave us life.
We'll shout Your praise, O King,
You give us joy nothing else can bring,
We'll give to You our offering
In celebration praise.

Come on and celebrate,
Celebrate,
Celebrate and sing,

Celebrate and sing to the King.
Come on and celebrate,
Celebrate,
Celebrate and sing,
Celebrate and sing to the King.

Prayer - Present, Presence, Presents

Let us pray a prayer, of being present in God's presence, giving and receiving presents.

BEING PRESENT

Amazing, awesome God, Lord of lords, King of kings, You invite us to be present at your celebration banquet. You welcome us into your incredible kingdom.

How wonderful it is to be present here today!

The call has gone out and we have heard, RSVP, we arrive and bow down before the Lord of Hosts.

How wonderful it is to be present here today!

Praise and honour, splendour and glory be to God who has brought us here.

KNOWING PRESENCE

In your holy presence O Lord, our sin is revealed, our failings exposed, and we are sorry.

Create in us a clean heart O God and renew a right spirit within us.

In your holy presence O Lord, grace abounds, mercy flourishes. In your grace forgive us and give us grace to forgive one another.

Create in us a clean heart O God and renew a right spirit within us.

May God's abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness through Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us, reign in our hearts and bring peace to our lives.

GIVING AND RECEIVING PRESENTS

Lord, Jireh, the One who provides all our needs and blesses us with all good gifts, be with us in this time of worship.

Renew and refresh us O Holy Spirit.

Share out your gifts, that we may be a blessing to others. Set us free with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Renew and refresh us O Holy Spirit.

As we bring ourselves to you, O Lord, as an offering, our waking and our sleeping, our work and our play, is all dedicated to you this day as a living present, holy and pleasing to you.

All our prayers we offer in the name of him who was gifted to the world, Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

Amen

Looking at the Cards...

When I was younger and it was my birthday my Grandma used to count the birthday cards and look at the messages in them. We're going to take a pause from the party to hear the messages in the cards. They may give us a sense of the connections we have, the breadth and length of them.

Ah, this one includes a message from Jesus. It's from a prayer he makes to God in John 17 verse 20:

"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

I can see that's a good message for us on our anniversary – we are people who have believed through hearing the words that have been passed down from the first disciples. It's also a good thought for celebrating the anniversary of a united church, a prayer that we may be one that the world may believe. It's good news that it doesn't just depend on our efforts, but on opening up to God and sharing in the relationship between Jesus and his Father.

This one's got a message from Jesus too, looks like it follows on from the last:

"The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

A bit more flowery than the usual 'with love from' you get in a card, but the assurance of being loved by God is the basis of the love that makes us one.

Now what's this one say? Another with a message from the same passage in John:

Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

I guess that's a better encouragement than 'many happy returns', the promise that we Jesus is, gathered in God's love, we will be also. It's a future hope, but

one we can be sure of because that love can be in us now. That's something worth sharing as we make Jesus and his way to God known to those around us.

Introducing pass the parcel...

To contribute to the party theme, we have included a few games we have played at parties. The first is pass the parcel. There is a parcel made up of many layers. You pass it round whilst the music plays. When the music stops, you unwrap a layer, and in the middle there is a prize. Some people play it with a forfeit in each layer, like running round the circle or standing on one leg till the music stops. Others have a small prize in each layer so everyone's a winner. Turns out that we play it that way, you'll see in each layer there is the gift of one of the Synod Support Team, not so much for the person who unwrapped it, but for all the congregations in the synod.

Pass the Parcel

There is no spoken word in this section

Hymn – Jubilate

Jubilate, everybody
serve the Lord in all your ways and
come before his presence singing,
enter now his courts with praise!
For the Lord our God is gracious
and his mercy's everlasting:
Jubilate, jubilate, jubilate, Deo!

Jubilate, Jubilate,
canu cân o foliant wnawn i'r Arglwydd
Jubilate, jubilate,
gwaeddon gyda'n gilydd, molwn ef;
dewch i mewn i'w byth â diolch
i'w gynteddau awn dan ganu,
jubilate, jubilate, jubilate, Deo!

Introducing more party games...

We've included some more party games. That links them into our theme, but the ideas connected with them give different perspectives on church life and our relationship with each other and God.

Chocolate game

Well here we have the children playing a game and if you see them playing the game you can sort of work out exactly what they're up to.

They have to throw a 6 on the dice as they sit in their circle. They're already equipped with their knife and fork knowing what's in store. Perhaps if they manage to throw a 6, then they make their way to the the centre of the circle begin to dress up in the hat and the scarf and the gloves and then attempt to eat the sweet.

I think its a Mars bar. Other brands are available. There on the plate in the centre of the room.

And of course, once they've managed to do that without anybody else throwing a 6, because if somebody else throws a6 there, they will be disturbed and asked to move on, then they're able to eat some of the Mars bar as a reward as their prize. Once they've eaten a little bit, they take their place back in the circle until somebody else actually throws 6. A good fun game to have with a group whether young or old. And indeed, if you got a sweet tooth, even better.

A bit of a topsy turvy game really because what we're doing is setting up rules that make it difficult for us to get at the chocolates.

In this case, the rules are that you must throw the six, so that's the first barrier, and then you must dress up in ways that make it difficult for you to actually cut the chocolate with a knife and fork.

Surely it would be easier if we were all dressed up, ready to go and then on throwing a 6 we're able to take off the things that stop us from getting at the chocolate quickly.

But of course, rules are rules, and I suppose we've got to follow them as best as we can. And even though it may be fun trying to get at the chocolate, it can also get a bit boring as you're waiting for your turn.

And especially we see in the example here towards the end when nobody manages to throw a 6. So the chocolate is left there in the middle, with a lot of it left uneaten.

So how would you make up rules perhaps that would help us to achieve the aim here.? What's the best way to maybe support each other so not only do we get to win a prize, but maybe that prize is shared out amongst more people?

What does it feel like to be part of a team - if you're working as a team, yet sometimes have to go it alone on occasions, because that's what we've got here.

They're working as a team in passing the dice around and throwing the dice, but of course when it comes to achieving the success of throwing a 6 and going

then into eating the chocolate, you've got to work alone and get all the gloves and the hat and the scarf on so you can go with your knife and fork.

And we do have to go it alone on many occasions.

The lectionary reading for today, the end of May is from John 17 verse 20-26. This draws an end to our Easter season, actually, as we step into a new season next Sunday.

And in the reading that's at John 17, it's the time when Jesus prays for all believers.

He's praying for you and me. He's praying for the children in the game that we've just watched.

Jesus prays that all of us may be as one.

In other words, he's hoping that we will have the same relationship with each other as Jesus had with the Father. A relationship of love, a trusting relationship, a helpful relationship.

A relationship where we assist each other. Help each other, rely on each other.

In this case, of course, rely on each other and support each other to tell the story of Jesus.

When did you last tell others about Jesus?

In the game, children find it difficult to throw a 6. Some haven't done so at all during the game, some managed to throw six more than once.

Maybe the rules that we apply sometimes need to be changed so we are united in our efforts - that we can show we are perhaps as one as Jesus wants us to be. As Jesus prayed for us to be.

So no matter what the rules, no matter what barriers are put in our ways, sometimes we need to change things for the better. We need to change things so the world can see that we are together, that we are in relationship with each other just as Jesus is in a relationship with his heavenly Father.

So let us pray, I will start our prayer with the words of Jesus.

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who believe in me through their message that all of them may be one father, just as you are in me and I am in you.

So it is gracious God that we pray that we will indeed show the world that we are one, that the world will understand, that the same relationship Jesus had with you is evident in our own lives. Then the world will know indeed that we are a loved people.

People who are righteous in your eyes.

Father God be with us on this Sunday? Be with us in our time of leisure and games as well as with us in our time of worship and praise at all times.

Let us be the people to show your love to others who have yet to hear of the gospel.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Simon Says

It's the kind of game I played as a child at Sunday School parties. We're going to play, 'Simon says.' I tell you what to do and you do it. But you only do it if I say, 'Simon says, do this or that.' If I just say do this or do that without saying 'Simon says' then you don't do it. If you do it when Simon hasn't said do it, then you're out. The winner is the last one left in. Got it? Thumbs up if you're ready.

Ok Simon says, thumbs up if you're ready!

We aren't going to carry on until there's one person left, you've obviously played the game before. You can try playing later wherever you are. It's a bit of fun, but it encourages good listening, concentration and co-ordination. The same is true of following Jesus. The life of the synod is not about doing what Simon says, but following Jesus and paying attention to what Jesus says. So what does Jesus say?

1 Jesus was asked about the greatest commandments. He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' And, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.'

2 Jesus says, 'In everything do to others as you would have them do to you.'

3 Jesus says this is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

4 Paul tells the Galatians, 'Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.'

5 At the end of the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus asked the scribe, 'Who was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'

Simon says go and do likewise.

Musical chairs

We're back to the Brownies for our final party game: Musical chairs. You may remember playing this. Everyone has a chair to sit on in a line. The players get up and walk around the chairs while the music plays. One chair is taken away.

When the music stops, the players have to find a chair to sit on. The one without a chair is out. In each round, a chair is taken away and another person is out. Unless it's going on a long time and the one with the power takes more chairs away. In the end there are two players and one chair, and when the music stops there is a frantic rush and one winner! And probably a number of disappointed onlookers.

So why have we chosen this as one of our Jubilee party games? Well, when the people of God settled in the land God promised, the Bible tells how God allocated the land to tribes and families to enjoy. You could say, there were enough seats for everyone. But you know how things go: someone's land doesn't produce as much as another's, another person doesn't work as hard, and before long some have more than others, some need to offload some of their land, others need to work for someone else. The Biblical idea of Jubilee recognised that if that goes unchecked, some people get more and more, and some people end up enslaved, there is increasing inequality with wealth and outcomes. You could say the chairs are taken away from under people and they end up left out. The Biblical idea of jubilee every 50 years gave the vision to rest, reset and rejoice. It was part of remembering that the land and the people belonged to God. Eating what the land produced by itself reminded them of their reliance on God. Restoring the land to those to whom it was originally given reminded them to reset to everything being a gift from God. Rejoicing reminded them to be thankful to God.

You can find more about these themes in the 'Celebrate Together' book that has been sent free to every church, or in the 'Jubilee' Children and Youth Work theme book. You can also discover more on the URC website by searching for URC jubilee.

So in contrast to a game of musical chairs where only one person wins, we can imagine there being a place for everyone. It's as though musical chairs is played in reverse. This is appropriate for us in our 50th anniversary year, our jubilee, it reminds us that people in our traditions campaigned for social justice. It reminds us that what we are and have is a gift from God, and it reminds us that we are trying to include people, to share God's blessings, and to show as the hymn says, that for everyone born there's a place at the table.

For everyone born, a place at the table,
for everyone born, clean water and bread,
a shelter, a space, a safe place for growing,
for everyone born, a star overhead,
and God will delight when we are creators
of justice and joy, compassion and peace:
yes, God will delight when we are creators
of justice, justice and joy!

Prayers of Intercession

Eternal God

Today is the day for Jubilee.

We have much to celebrate in our lives, in all creation, in our churches, in all peoples and every nation, in our communities and in the 50 years of witness, praise and celebration of the URC!

Let there be singing; let there be dancing;

a celebration as has never been before,

Let there be laughter and great rejoicing –

O let there be jubilee.

As we waive our banners and sing our songs, we rejoice that you are a God of justice and compassion; you exalt those that are outcast and downcast, so, as we celebrate all you give to us, we offer our gifts to you:

May we be an encourager and a listening ear to those that are poor in spirit, raising our voices for the silenced and ignored - for we will hear of your kingdom within their stories.

May we make time to comfort those who mourn, for loss of freedom, loss of security, loss of loved ones - for we will grow in compassion whilst we sit alongside those that travel through the hard times.

May we support the meek, the gentle, the humble also the submissive or docile, for we shall be taught about the things that are important in your eyes.

May we be challenged by those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, opening our eyes to what is moral, what justice might feel like. May we deal fairly with mighty and lowly, beginning to recognise, celebrate and implement virtue and decency.

May we learn from, and copy, the merciful, for God knows, we need to be kinder, more compassionate, generous to the point of extravagance, Forgiving, sharing the harvests of food, medicine, science and technology so all have enough; all people flourish;

May we appreciate everything and everyone that is pure in heart, for they shall see God and we want to share their vision.

May we support peacemakers, stretch ourselves beyond being peace-lovers, tearing down barriers, offering radical welcome - knowing those you call children of God have worked to pour your love upon conflict.

May we be bold in supporting those who suffer persecution for righteousness' sake, shouldering some of their burdens, working for their freedom for, through them, we may celebrate all that is Godly within humankind and be joyful that you are always near.

Today is the day for Jubilee, may we rejoice and be glad in it.

Amen

Party Bags

We can't let you go without a party bag. What have we got in here? Something that looks like a piece of cake – that'll be squashed by the time I get home. A packet of Haribo starmix – they'll be eaten by the time I get home. A compass – that might help me get home. A fridge magnet. A yoyo. And a puzzle. I wonder if I can do that? You can't just force it. You have to line things up – there.

Let's use these things for a prayer.



Living God,
as we remember where we have been,
help us draw on our experience

As we cope with the ups and downs of life
may Jesus be our example

As we focus on where we are going,
may your Spirit guide us

As we travel through life
sustain us on the journey

When what we face isn't a piece of cake
help us persevere

So that we may
acknowledge the past
celebrate the present
and look to the future

finding new life in you
and bringing freedom to others

Amen

We hope that we might gather in person sometime. We are busy planning the synod Big Day Out on the Royal Welsh Showground on 25th June, when we will be marking the URC at 50, celebrating the whole people of God. We can make connections with people across the synod, worship with a bigger bunch of people, and share what's happening across Wales and the wider church. There's more information on the website with a link to register: we need to know if you are coming. search for URC Wales Big Day Out 2022.

We are going to sing Guide me O, but then we are going to complete our worship by praying the grace for each other. But we are going to complete our party theme by singing it to the tune of Auld Lang Syne, because that song completes many a party in Scotland and we have a couple of Celtic cousins on the team.

Hymn - Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty,
hold me with thy powerful hand:
 bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore.

Agor y ffynhonnau melys
sydd yn tarddu o'r Graig i maes;
'r hyd yr anial mawr canlyned
afon iachawdwriaeth gras:
 rho im hynny—
dim i mi ond dy fwynhau.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death, and hell's destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side:
 songs of praises,
I will ever give to thee.

The Grace to Auld Lang Syne

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
and the love of Father God
the fellowship of God's Spirit
be with us all, Amen.

Forevermore, and evermore,
and evermore, Amen!
Forevermore, and evermore,
and evermore, Amen!