**Hall fold URC 28th February 2021**

**Theme: Rocky relationships**

Thank you for the invitation to preach at Hallfold URC. As you know we can’t do this in person so I am sending this out to you in case you wish to follow what would have been todays service.

**Welcome**

Holy God, we come from our busy lives.
We often forget that you walk with us.
As we gather now, help us to be more aware of who you are.
Give us the courage to admit when we don’t understand,
so that we might grow more like you in all we do.
**Amen.**

**Hymn 261 (R&S): At the name of Jesus**

At the name of Jesus
every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him
King of Glory now.
'Tis the Father's pleasure
we should call him Lord,
who from the beginning
was the mighty Word:

Humbled for a season,
to receive a name
from the lips of sinners
unto whom he came,
faithfully he bore it
spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious
when from death he passed.

In your hearts enthrone him;
there let him subdue
all that is not holy,
all that is not true:
crown him as your captain
in temptation's hour;
let his will enfold you
in its light and power.

When this same Lord Jesus
shall return again,
in his Father's glory,
There with him to reign
Then may we adore him

All before him bow
and our hearts confess him
King of Glory now.

Caroline M. Noble (1817-77)

**Prayers of adoration and confession**

Lord we come openly to revere you O lord
to praise and worship you
Let our hearts rejoice with everlasting joy.
All-powerful God of past, present and future,
keeper of promises:
**How we love you.**
Son of Man, the way, the truth and the life,
loving despite rejection:
**How we love you.**
Holy Spirit, living Power within,
helping, guiding, testing and transforming:
**How we love you.**
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
your unique relationship – open to us:
**How we love you.**

Words of greeting on the lips; words of love on the lips –
the example you gave us:
forgive us when we fail to act as you do, Lord.
Words of retaliation, insincerity and malice on our lips:
forgive us when we act towards others in this way, Lord.
Overwhelmed by complex relationships and rocky paths:
forgive us for not setting our minds on you and your ways.
Fear of rejection and wary of being our true selves:
forgive us and help us to give of ourselves as you give.
Forgive us, Lord, for our failure to trust you;
for not allowing you to be in the driving seat.
Lord of covenant relationship, lead us
and help us to live your way.
Jesus was handed over to be crucified because of our sins.
He died and rose again to make us right with God.
Through him we are forgiven.
Let us follow the Lord our God, giving our lives as he gave his for us.

In your name we praise and love you Amen.

Let us say quietly together the **Lord’s Prayer**

**Bible Reading**

**Genesis 17.1-7 & 15-16**

**The Sign of the Covenant**

**17**When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am God Almighty;[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+17:1-7,+15-16&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-399a)] walk before me, and be blameless. **2**And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.” **3**Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, **4**“As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. **5**No longer shall your name be Abram,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+17:1-7,+15-16&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-403b)] but your name shall be Abraham;[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+17:1-7,+15-16&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-403c)] for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. **6**I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. **7**I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+17:1-7,+15-16&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-405d)] after you.

**15**God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. **16**I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”

**Mark 8.31-38**

**Jesus predicts his death**

**31**He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. **32**He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

**33**But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. ‘Get behind me, Satan!’ he said. ‘You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.’

**The way of the cross**

**34**Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. **35**For whoever wants to save their life[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+8:31-38&version=NIVUK#fen-NIVUK-24536a)] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. **36**What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? **37**Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? **38**If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.’

**Hymn 373 (R&S): Lord Jesus Christ, you have come to us**

Lord Jesus Christ you have come to us You are one with us, Mary’s Son.
Cleansing our souls from all their sin
pouring Your love and goodness in Jesus our love for you we sing,
living Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ now and every day Teach us how to pray, Son of God. You have commanded us to do this in remembrance Lord of you
Into our lives your power breaks through, living Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ, you have come to us Born as one with us, Mary’s Son.
Led out to die on Calvary,
risen from death to set us free,
living Lord Jesus help us see
You are Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ I would come to you live my life for you, Son of God.
All your commands I know are true,
your many gifts will make me new,
into my life your power breaks through,
living Lord;

Patrick Appleford (1925 -) altd.

**Sermon**

Through the psalmist, God says,
‘Be still, and know that I am God!’
Let us come into God’s presence and still our hearts.
Let us come together to listen to God.
Let us be still, and know that God is indeed God.

Today we are going to see how even Jesus and his disciples didn’t always agree. But that didn’t mean that Jesus rejected them. In fact, it was through having the courage to argue with Jesus that the disciples learned how to follow him.

* How easy would you find it to speak up in group situations?
* What topics would you be prepared to speak up about, even with fear of rejection?
* How do you react when there is conflict or disagreement?

I’m sure like me, many of you don’t like to speak in group situations. Fearful that you may say the wrong thing, or antagonise someone and worse of all be spoken down too.

I find it hard sometimes to say the right words. I get tongue tied. I forget what I’m saying and sometimes loose the words I want to speak.

I often lie in bed and speak to myself and get ideas of what to say and how to say things. But when I get to the situation all my thoughts vanish.

Or sometimes after a meeting I look back and think of the stuff I could have said. Hindsight is always a great factor.

The theme is rocky relationships. These could be anything from parent to child, spouse to spouse, work managers, team or colleagues, church members, elders’ meetings (you don’t have authority here Jackie Weaver – remember that?). Rocky relationships can cover a huge part of our lives. I think more so during the past year when people have been cooped up inside. Theres nowhere to escape too. I’m sure it’s tested quite a lot of relationships.

In the reading from the Old Testament, we see that in God’s first covenant with Abram, the latter is told ‘no one but your very own issue shall be your heir’.

But in this second covenant, 13 years after the birth of Ishmael to Abram and Hagar, an Egyptian slave-girl, he is told that his wife Sarai will also have a son. Ishmael will be blessed as the father of a great nation – ‘because he is your offspring’. But the ‘everlasting covenant’ is with Isaac. Rescued by God on the mountain in Moriah, Isaac will be the source of blessing for all nations. Abram and Sarai are blessed together and given their new names: Abraham (ancestor of a multitude) and Sarah (princess). Their son is to be named Isaac (he laughs), and indeed both Abraham, initially content with Ishmael as his heir, and Sarah, thinking the Lord had made her barren, laugh at the suggestion that they can have a child at their age. But when Isaac is born Sarah says, ‘God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me’.

Whilst in the Old Testament we have heard that Abraham and Sarah are universal figures, giving rise to the multitude of nations. Here in the New Testament Jesus as ‘the Son of Man’ is the prototype of a humanity that is God’s delight, the one whose faithfulness and love will triumph over the forces of oppression and destruction. The Scriptures characterise Satan as the source of opposition to God’s purposes, and resentful of God’s delight in humanity’s holiness. We heard in last week’s reading that as soon as God had said to Jesus, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased’, Satan tested him in the wilderness. Now Jesus recognises Satan at work again as Peter tries to deflect him from his faithfulness to God in his service of others. Jesus refuses to succumb to this temptation to disobey God by focusing on human ambition rather than divine providence. This seems to reverse the story of Adam and Eve’s succumbing to the serpent’s temptation to disobey God.

That disobedience led to recriminations that fractured relationships, but Jesus’ obedience establishes a new community as he invites others to follow his generous way of self-giving to others, letting go of selfish ambition ‘for the sake of the good news’ of God’s glorious purpose for humanity. Despite the necessary rebuke, six days later Peter is included in Jesus’ transfiguration, helping

Jesus is telling his disciples a difficult truth about what will happen to him in his death and resurrection, but Peter finds it hard to take, and argues with Jesus. Jesus sets out that God’s ways are different from human nature: we must forget about our earthly desires and follow Jesus.

Sometimes it can be hard to accept a difficult truth. We might wonder if there have been times when we have had to receive a difficult truth. How did we react? How might we have responded if we had been in Peter’s shoes?

How do you cope with disagreement? For lots of reasons, each of us reacts differently when people disagree with us or one another. Some can become quite feisty like hedgehogs and enjoy the argument; others can become silent like tortoises and hide in their shells.

What is the way that Christians should respond? Is the best way to be peaceful and calm, never to disagree? Maybe when the things we are disagreeing about are not very important. But what if the thing we are disagreeing about is important or about truth and justice?

Jesus and Peter are an example of how open disagreement can lead to a place of understanding one another and God’s way better. Jesus is trying to teach the disciples that the kind of Messiah that they have in mind isn’t quite right. They still seem to think that Jesus is going to be powerful and conquer the world. Jesus wants to show them that he’s going to appear to do the opposite: he will be rejected, suffer and die.

But think carefully about the scene. Perhaps you know people, especially leaders, who you’d be frightened to disagree with because they might reject you! Jesus seems to have created an atmosphere among his friends where they weren’t afraid. Peter is quite confident in his contradiction of Jesus. And Jesus is comfortable to disagree with Peter – very strongly. But is Peter kicked out of the group? Is Peter rejected? Far from it – in fact, just a few verses further in chapter 9, we read that Jesus chooses Peter with James and John for a special experience.

If we are to grow as people of faith, we need to be able to create an environment where we feel safe enough to disagree but know we will not be rejected.

How many times this last week have you agreed with someone. On the other hand how many times have you disagreed with someone.

I’m sure there have been many times for both. But how does it make you feel. Are you uncomfortable with disagreement and would you prefer to agree most of the time? It would be a very bland world if we agreed all the time. It is challenging to stand up for yourself. Its needs courage to tell someone that they are wrong. You need conviction and strength in what you say. Sometimes we need to ‘set out our stall’ as it were so that those around us know where they stand. It’s healthy to debate and disagree provided its backed up with logic. Not everyone thinks the same way and it needs others to challenge them.

Did you know Twelve publishers rejected the first Harry Potter novel before Bloomsbury published it in 1997. Seeking an honest assessment of her first adult novel, JK Rowling submitted The Cuckoo’s Calling as Robert Galbraith. She received more rejections, and advice to attend a writers’ class, before Sphere published it in 2013. Not fearing rejection, she persevered with Harry Potter – which so many children have found such delight in reading. And again, not fearing rejection, as Robert Galbraith she has encouraged aspiring writers to have confidence in their work. You wouldn’t think that J K Rowling would have her work rejected as she is a well-known author.

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If we are to grow as people of faith, we need to be able to create an environment where we feel safe enough to disagree but know we will not be rejected. Can we do that? Amen

**Prayers of Intercession**

Lord God, we thank you for our relationships.For spouses.
For family.
For children.
For parents.

For friends.
For brothers and sisters in Christ.
Lord God, we thank you for all our relationships.
For the good times and the rocky times.

We pray for all those we know and love
– especially those who don’t know what it is to know you.
Thank you that when we follow your leading,
you give us the strength and confidence to share without fear.
Thank you that we can stand in faith as Abraham did,
setting our minds on you
and trusting in your timing and promises always.
And when something gets the better of us,
and we forget about you,
thank you for never giving up on us.
We praise you, Lord.
**Amen.**

**Hymn 574 (R&S): Go forth and tell**

Go forth and tell! O Church of God, awake!
God's saving news to all the nations take;
Proclaim Christ Jesus, Saviour, Lord, and King,
That all the world His worthy praise may sing.

Go forth and tell! God's love embraces all;
He will in grace respond to all who call;
How shall they call if they have never heard
The gracious invitation of His Word!

Go forth and tell! The doors are open wide;
Share God's good gifts--let no one be denied;
Live out your life as Christ, your Lord, shall choose,
Your ransomed pow'rs for His sole glory use.

Go forth and tell! O Church of God, arise!
Go in the strength which Christ, your Lord, supplies;
Go till all nations His great name adore
And serve Him, Lord and King, forevermore.

James E. Seddon (1915-83)

Words Mrs M. Seddon/Jubilee Hymns Ltd

**Blessing**

Everything I am Lord, and everything I do.
**Help me to be always more like you.**

Teach me to be yours, Lord, show me when I’m wrong.
**Help me to be always more like you.**

You accepted all, Lord, help everyone to find the way.
**Help me to be always more like you.**
**Amen.**