

Link

April 2026

The Magazine of the United Reformed Church
Stratford-upon-Avon



Worship, Witness and love for others through Jesus Christ

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Thoughts for April

Easter Hope

I recently led one of the Lenten Group sessions on Hope in the context of Climate Change. In my research I came across the speech made by Barack Obama at Jesse Jackson's funeral. I think that it has wider implications for hope in the current political climate. Here is an extract of it.

"We are living in a time when it can be hard to hope. Each day we wake up to some new assault on our democratic institutions, another setback to the idea of the rule of law, an offense to common decency. Every day you wake up to things you just didn't think were possible. Each day, we're told by those in high office to fear each other and to turn on each other, and that some Americans count more than others, and that some don't even count at all. Everywhere we see greed and bigotry being celebrated, and bullying and mockery masquerading as strength. We see science and expertise denigrated, while ignorance and dishonesty and cruelty and corruption are reaping untold rewards. Every single day we see that, and it's hard to hope in those moments. So, it may be tempting to get discouraged, to give into cynicism. It may be tempting for some to compromise with power, and grab what you can, or even for good people to maybe just put your head down and wait for the storm to pass.

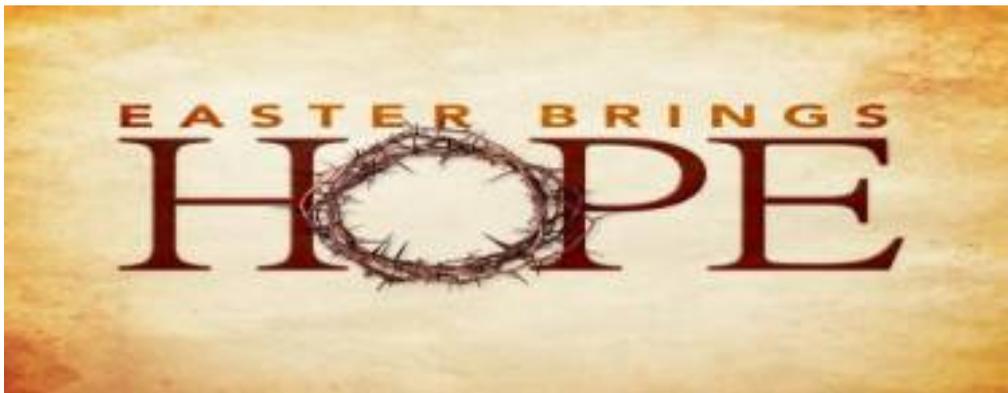
But this man, Rev. Jesse Lewis Jackson, inspires us to take a harder path. His voice calls on each of us to be heralds of change, to be messengers of hope, to step forward and say, "Send me." Wherever we have a chance to make an impact, whether it's in our school or our workplaces or our neighbourhoods or our cities, not for fame, not for glory, or because success is guaranteed, but because it gives our life purpose, because it aligns with what our faith tells us God demands, and because if we don't step up, no one else will."

The current political climate is very depressing: the rise of far-right politics, the war in Iran, the moves to denigrate people to gain political purchase, the marginalisation of minority groups, the picturing of many Muslims as terrorists - I could go on and on and on. Barack Obama's second paragraph gives us all the impetus to be agents of change, agents of hope. I have said this many times, but as Christians we are called to love our neighbours, not to denigrate them, not to



marginalise them for our own benefit, not to drop bombs on them, and not to be agents accelerating Climate Change. And, as Obama says, our God demands our loving actions.

The Easter story gives us all hope. It is the happiest day of the whole Christian story. We can all look forward to our redemption because Christ died for us. He rose from the dead to set us free from sin and offer us eternal life. We need to shout that from the rooftops; we need to tell people of the Good News. We have hope! We have joy!



I will say this on Palm Sunday: we also need to take note of the story of the apostles task to secure the donkey for Jesus to ride on when he rode into Jerusalem. Jesus said “If anybody asks why you are taking it, simply say: ‘The lord has need of it’”.

Because of the joy and the hope of Easter ‘The Lord has need of us, too’. We need to be agents of hope, agents of joy, agents of peace, agents of integration.

As Pope John said: “We are an Easter People and Alleluia is our song”. This message calls for faith-filled living, unselfish love and bringing the hope, the light and the joy of the resurrection to a challenging world.

We might be sad in Holy Week about what the human race did to Jesus, but the resurrection outshines any dismay, any sadness and any pessimism.

Peter

People have always named their children after expensive things, like: Mercedes, Dior, Chardonnay.

Next year watch out for Petrol, Gas and Electricity.

Family News

Linda has now got a date for her cataract operation. We wish her a bright new world.

The Alvarez family are all well and settling into their new life.

Katie has cancelled her planned trip to Hungary due to uncertainty over the current Middle East situation and the resulting ramifications.

Ileen Fisher

What's on at the Bear Pit

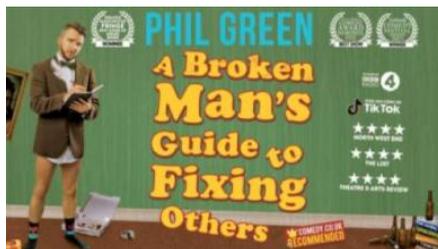
Night Falls: 31st March at 7.30 & 1st April at 2.30pm



Night Falls is a contemporary and dynamic retelling of the Easter Story - performed by Riding Lights. Please see information leaflets at the back of church.

Tickets: £15 (under 16's £10)

A Broken Man's Guide to Fixing Others: 10th April



Having definitely, totally 100% recovered from a breakdown, Phil now presents a show to save us all from a mental health crisis (well, maybe not everyone).

Suitable for Ages 16+

Ticket: £15

Angry Boater aka Joel Sanders: 11th April at 7.30pm

In 2000, Joel Sanders performed a run of shows in Las Vegas. 26 years on, he's finally made it to The Bearpit.

“Sharp, funny and completely original”

Join the charismatic star of Channel

4's 'Narrow Escapes' for his flagship show about dropping out of society to become a nomad on the UK's waterways.

Tickets: £15

Stratford One Act Festival: 15th to 18th April at 7.30

The Stratford One Act Festival returns to the Bear Pit with a variety of local authors. See the Bear Pit website for details of each night.

Tickets: £7.50

All My Sons: 19th April at 7.30pm



A National Theatre Screening. Arthur Miller's searing American tragedy is brought to the screen in a critically acclaimed National Theatre Live production directed by visionary theatre-maker Ivo van Hove.

Tickets: £14



Titania: 24th to 25th April at 7.30pm

Do you still believe in fairies? What happened after the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?

Titania, the fairy queen, now cleans the theatre where she lives. Yes, she's been through a lot in the four hundred and thirty years since Shakespeare's play. Her husband's wound himself into a cocoon, Puck's gone cyberpunk, and Titania's just stolen something – or someone – who she really ought to give back.

Can her magic even exist in this fractured world of ours? Comical, tragical, poetical, ecological, our new one-woman show will take you deep into the forest.

Tickets: £15 (under 25's £10)

Show Time: 28th & 29th April at 7.30pm

Stratford Musical Theatre Company is proud to present *Show Time!* an exciting musical revue from the Members of our Youth Company!

Featuring show-stopping numbers from productions such as *The Greatest Showman*, *Matilda*, *Dear Evan Hansen*, *Wicked*, *Moulin Rouge* and more.

Tickets: £10 (Under 16's: £8)



Creating Peace



The sign on the river estuary, fixed to rocks in the water, said, "Slow Speed - Minimum Wake". In other words, any boats and jet-skis should disturb the surrounding environment as little as possible when they passed through.

Wonderfully, birds had built nests on top of the sign.

When you create peace in your part of the world, you have no idea who might benefit from it. And it doesn't matter, as long as someone - or something - does!

Flatiron

I've seen the Flatiron in New York and a similar building in San Francisco. The New York building is about 20 storeys high; the one in San Francisco about half that. Both are substantial buildings with 'sizeable footprints'.

But if you look at them from a certain point of view - towards the sharp end - they each look like they are only one room wide, like they might be blown over by a strong wind.

Sometimes we see each other from a similar point of view and stick with it. Better to take a walk around the building, and the person, to get a better, more rounded view of what they are really like!



Two articles submitted by Fran Maddy - published in the Friendship Book

The Annunciation

Whilst on holiday in Florence shortly after Christmas, Dave and I saw three different artists' interpretation of The Annunciation.

The first, a very traditional painting by Fra Angelico, a picture which has been a favourite of mine since I first saw it in Florence in 1998. He painted many versions, but they are all very similar.



The second is David Hockney's interpretation of Fra Angelico's painting. I like

Hockney's work very much, the bold use of colour and his willingness to experiment make his work interesting and I think this is a good example.



The third just made me smile!



Two colossal wooden figures, each more than six meters tall, face each other like Mary and the Archangel Gabriel. But instead of a lily or a ray of divine light, they hold smartphones. A simple, everyday gesture becomes transcendent - a contemporary Annunciation rendered in pixels and timber.

I loved the contemporary nature of the work, should a modern day Mary find herself so blessed, who is to say she would not receive the message by text!

Ann Jones

I'm not saying that I'm old, but if you hear me say: "I put it in a really safe place" - just know that we are never going to see it again.

The Ballad of the Judas Tree

In Hell there grew a Judas Tree
Where Judas hanged and died
Because he could not bear to see
His master crucified.

Our Lord descended into Hell
And found his Judas there
For ever hanging on the tree
Grown from his own despair
So Jesus cut his Judas down
And took him in his arms.
“It was for this I came” he said
“And not to do you harm
My Father gave me twelve good men
And all of them I kept
Though one betrayed and one denied
Some fled and others slept
In three days’ time I must return
To make the others glad
But first I had to come to Hell
And share the death you had
My tree will grow in place of yours
Its roots lie here as well
There is no final victory
Without this soul from Hell”
So when we all condemned him
As of every traitor worst
Remember that of all his men
Our Lord forgave him first



By Ruth Etchells

To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God
has forgiven the inexcusable in you.

C.S. Lewis

Lenten surprises at church

I think that Lent has brought out several surprises. Perhaps you can think of others?

Firstly, it is clear that Peter and Carole would be just at home in the Bearpit as in the church next door. Their prowess at temptation is really a bit worrying!

Secondly, it seems that although we are struggling to get young people in the church we did have two wonderfully well behaved dogs in church on Mothering Sunday. Perhaps a start?

Thirdly, the lycra clad figure of Geoffrey on the same Sunday was a truly impressive sight.

Lastly, who would have thought that there were so many schoolboys in the Stratford area that could play the organ so impressively!

Have you any more surprises?

David Sampson

Figures of Speech

As a lot of our church members are of a similar age to myself, I expect that a lot of you remember learning the more exotic figures of speech around the same time that you took the 11 plus. Hyperbole, litotes, onomatopoeia, alliteration, oxymoron. There are no prizes but if you can still define four of them, I will be impressed.

I always had a soft spot for the last one, oxymoron. It means a combination of contradictory terms, for example “deafening silence.” The one that made me smile was “military intelligence” until my nephew was promoted to N.A.T.O military intelligence and I decided that this was not a tactful thought!

One that has become very widely heard in the last two years is “Christian nationalism”. It originated in the U.S.A. but has begun to infiltrate some of the murkier corners of British politics in the last 12 months.

It is, of course, a perfect oxymoron. Christianity cannot be nationalist and Jesus made this perfectly clear in Luke’s gospel, chapter 10, verses 25 to 37. This passage answers the question, “Who is my neighbour?” when he tells the story of the good Samaritan. Anyone who has read the New Testament soon learns that Jews did not like Samaritans or vice versa. That is, of course, the point of the story. They were not of the same tribe, the same nation, but the Samaritan helped his neighbour as

we all should do. I am totally puzzled that anybody reading the words of Jesus in the Gospels should miss this point so completely. Perhaps thinking of the “oxymoron” will help you to remember that we should love not only our friends but our enemies. (Matthew 5. Verse 44)



It may be easier to love people who we like and who are more familiar to us. More effort will be needed in more unfamiliar situations but that is the effort we are called to make as Christians.

David Sampson

When I first met the poppies

When I first experienced “poppies”, not long after I started to work as a carer, the lady I looked after asked me to buy her a poppy. At first I thought ‘what a good



idea!’; I love poppies, they are my favourite summer wild flowers, but it was the end of October. How could I tell the lady who was so happy to buy a poppy, that I couldn’t buy any at this time of year? So I took a big breath and told her that it was impossible to get poppies now. She stared at me with big open eyes (I had the impression she regretted having me as a carer), and said “What are you talking about? You can get poppies at this time of the year.”

From my facial expression, she saw that I had no idea what she was talking about. She put her hand in mine and told me everything about the meaning of the poppies to her, and to the nation. She took one of the poppies out of a drawer and showed me. I asked her why

we should buy one more when there were a lot in the drawer, so she said that she

bought one every year because this is the way she could support people selling poppies for the British Legion in Remembrance of those killed or injured in the wars. When the custom started in 1921, poppies used to be made by injured servicemen. Since our conversation I have proudly worn a poppy (every year a new one), and I always remember Mrs Ashmore.

Last year, when I visited Holy Trinity Church, and saw the trees decorated with poppies, I loved it, and it gave me an idea: We could make our church as nice as Holy Trinity was. I got very excited and told my idea to my Elder, Ann, who thought it was a good idea, "Why not?"

I am now asking the same question, "Why not?" Let us decorate our church with poppies for Remembrance Day. If you'd like to join this venture, lets meet on Friday mornings during coffee time in church. I have already made some red poppies, and some purple for the animals, in crochet, and I can show you how I made them; if you can't crochet I can teach you, or if you prefer to knit them, you'll be welcome to. Lets spend a nice time together making poppies and having fun.

Please join us for our first meeting from 10 to 11.30 on Friday 10th April.

Thanks a lot, and see you then.

Katie Pinter

Looking at the picture - now there's a challenge!! - The Editors

More Puns

I was struggling to figure out how lightning works, and then it struck me!

The girl quit her job at the doughnut factory, because she was fed up with the hole business!

The first time I used an elevator it was really uplifting, but then it let me down.

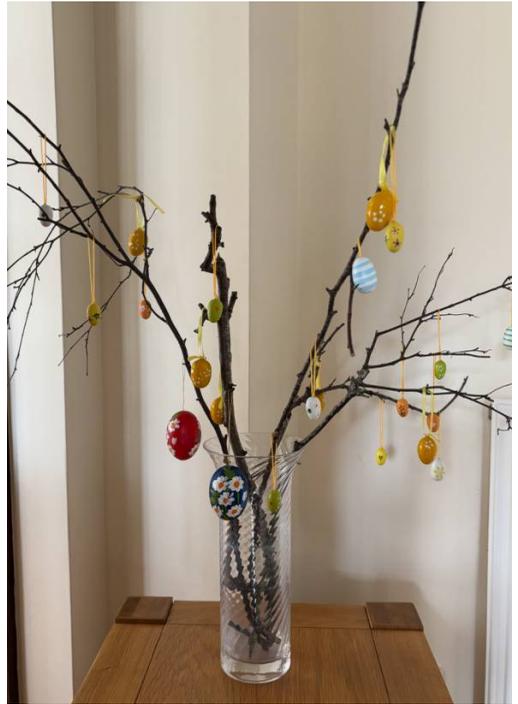
Pencils could be made with rubbers at both ends, but then what would be the point.

The dead batteries were given out free of charge.

Easter Trees

When we lived in Switzerland, we discovered a lovely tradition. In the run up to Easter, people decorate branches with little eggs. The eggs are painted and often wooden or blown. You either take a branch into the house or use a tree or bush in the garden.

This centuries old tradition apparently originated in Germany and then spread to other German speaking countries. It symbolized new life, Spring and the Resurrection. We also found it was a custom in the Alsace area of France where we lived for many years. This was no doubt due to its proximity to Germany and Switzerland. It is a tradition we have adopted and do each year.



This is our Easter tree for this year.

Kirsty Knott

The entire plan for the future has its key in the resurrection.

- Billy Graham



Islam

We came across this article posted on Facebook which we thought deserved our attention:

Muslims, and the Danger of Misinformation

Over the past year I've noticed a growing wave of misinformation about Islam and Muslims.

Sometimes it appears in careless comments. Sometimes in political rhetoric. Sometimes by thousands of bots flooding our news feeds. Sometimes as outright slurs. Words matter. Narratives matter. When misinformation spreads unchecked, it slowly begins to dehumanise an entire community.

So I'm not writing this to argue. I'm writing this for those who are open-minded and willing to understand.

"Islam teaches violence" One of the most common claims is that Islam promotes violence. People often quote a line from the Qur'an: "Kill them wherever you find them..."

But this verse is almost always quoted without context. It refers to a specific war in 7th-century Arabia, when the early Muslim community was facing persecution and attack. In the very same passage the Qur'an also says: "Fight those who fight you, but do not transgress. God does not love aggressors." (Qur'an 2:190) These verses were rules governing warfare, not commands to attack people for their beliefs.

Context matters in all scriptures. Verses describing warfare exist in many religious texts because they reflect ancient historical conflicts.

For example, the Bible contains passages such as: 1 Samuel 15:3 "Attack the Amalekites... put to death men and women, children and infants..." And Deuteronomy 20:16-17 "Do not leave alive anything that breathes." Most Christians understand these verses within their historical context, not as instructions for believers today. The same principle applies when reading the Qur'an.

Islam wants to force you to convert. One of the clearest teachings in the Qur'an states:

"There is no compulsion in religion." (Qur'an 2:256) Faith must come from belief and conviction, not coercion. The Qur'an even invites Jews and Christians to seek common ground: "Come to a common word between us and you."

Islam and the prophets and messengers, Islam does not reject the Messengers of

Judaism or Christianity. In fact, belief in them is essential to being a Muslim. Muslims believe in Prophets including: Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, John the Baptist, Jesus. Without believing in these Prophets, a Muslim's faith is incomplete. Islam stands firmly within the Abrahamic tradition.

Jesus in Islam, many people are surprised to learn how deeply Jesus is respected in Islam.

Jesus (known as Isa in Arabic) is:

- Called the Messiah
- Believed to be born to the Virgin Mary
- Described as a messenger of God
- Mentioned 25 times in the Qur'an

Mary herself holds such an honoured place that an entire chapter of the Qur'an is named after her.

How did Jesus refer to God? Jesus did not speak English. His everyday language was Aramaic, a Semitic language closely related to Arabic. In the Bible, Jesus refers to God as "Alaha." Aramaic, Hebrew and Arabic are sister languages, which is why their words for God are closely related, Aramaic: Alaha, Hebrew: Eloah / Elohim, Arabic: Allah. In fact, Arab Christians have used the word "Allah" for centuries in their Arabic Bibles and prayers.

So when Muslims say Allah, they are simply saying God, the same Creator worshipped by Abraham, Moses and Jesus.

The idea that Muslims want to impose their way of life: Sometimes people claim Muslims want to dominate or impose their way of life.

But let's think logically. There are around 2 billion Muslims worldwide, making Islam the second-largest religion on Earth. In the UK there are roughly 4 million Muslims within a population of over 70 million people. The idea that Muslims could somehow "take over society" simply does not stand up to reality.

A shared message of peace: Muslims greet one another by saying: "As-salāmu 'alaykum" — Peace be upon you. The Jewish greeting "Shalom aleichem" means exactly the same thing. Both come from the same ancient Semitic linguistic roots. Both carry the same message: Peace.

A final thought, Islam, like Christianity and Judaism, is followed by nearly a quarter of humanity. Like any religion, it can be misunderstood. But reducing an entire faith to headlines, fear, or isolated quotations does not bring understanding. It only deepens division.

The Qur'an reminds humanity of something profound: "O mankind! We created you from a single male and female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another." (Qur'an 49:13)

Perhaps the path to peace begins simply by choosing understanding over fear.

Written by Shah Lalol Amin

Imagine you were there.

Imagine it is barely morning, the kind where the sky is still pale and quiet and the world has not quite decided if it is going to be a good day or not. Two days earlier, you watched your teacher, your friend, the man you believed was the Messiah, die on a cross. You saw the nails go in. You heard the crowd yelling. You stood close enough to hear His final words. And when it was all over, they wrapped His body, laid Him in a borrowed tomb, rolled a stone in front of it, and that was that.

Hope, sealed behind a rock.

Now imagine a woman bursts into the room, out of breath, eyes wide, voice shaking. "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

Not, "He is alive." Not, "You are not going to believe what just happened." No. Her first thought, the only logical thought, was that someone had taken the body. Because bodies do not just get up and leave. That is not a thing that happens.

And before you even have time to process it, your feet just start moving.

That is what happened to Peter and me. No plan. No discussion. No thoughtful theological conversation about the implications. We just ran. Straight through the streets like two grown men who had completely forgotten about dignity, sandals slapping the stones, lungs burning, hearts pounding.

I could hear Peter behind me the whole time. He was older, broader, probably stronger, but I was younger and apparently built more for sprinting. So yes, I got there first. I am not saying it to brag. It is just a historical fact that happened to make it into the record. You are welcome, Peter.

But when I reached the tomb, I stopped.

The stone was rolled away, just like Mary said. The entrance was open, dark, and quiet. Suddenly all that running felt like a bad idea. Because now I actually had to look. It is one thing to run toward a problem. It is another thing entirely to bend down and stick your head into a tomb where your dead friend is supposed to be.

I leaned down and peered inside. The air in there was cool and still, the kind of still

that makes you feel like you should whisper even though no one is there. And on the stone slab were the linen cloths.

Empty. No body. No sign of a struggle. No mess. Just the cloths lying there, as if whoever had been wrapped inside them had simply got up and left.

Then Peter came charging up behind me, breathing like he had just run a marathon instead of a short sprint, and without even slowing down he went straight inside. That was Peter. No hesitation. No careful peeking. Just straight into the tomb like he was walking into a fishing shed to check on his nets.

I followed him in. The burial cloths were there, just like I saw from the entrance. But the face cloth, the one that had been wrapped around His head, was not with the others. It was folded up neatly and set aside.

Folded. Not tossed. Not ripped. Not left in a heap. Folded.

Now, I have never robbed a grave, but I am fairly confident grave robbers are not known for their attention to detail. No one breaks into a tomb, steals a body, and then pauses to carefully fold the face cloth like they are tidying up before company comes over. And bodies, as a general rule, do not unwrap themselves, fold their own burial cloths, and then wander off.

Standing there in that quiet tomb, everything suddenly felt different. The fear was still there. The confusion was still there. But underneath it, something else started to rise. Something that felt suspiciously like hope, the kind you almost do not want to touch because it has already hurt you once.

He had told us this would happen.

Over and over again, He had said He would rise. The Scriptures had pointed to it. The prophets had spoken about it. And we nodded along like good students, but deep down we did not really get it. Not until we were standing in a tomb that was supposed to hold a body...and did not.

He was not stolen. He was not lost. He was not dead. He was gone because He had risen.

I had not seen Him yet. I had not heard His voice. I had not touched His hands. All I saw was an empty space where death was supposed to be, a set of folded cloths, and a tomb that had lost its purpose.

And somehow, that was enough for me to believe.

Because sometimes the loudest message in the world is not something you see. Sometimes it is the thing that is missing. And that morning, death was the thing that was missing. And I do not know about you, but that is the kind of absence that changes everything.

Sunday Services at 9.30am

3rd April	Tenebrae 8pm	Peter Horrocks
5th April	Holy Communion	Peter Horrocks
	Easter Day	
19th April	Morning Service	Revd Geoffrey Hodgess Roper
3rd May	Holy Communion	Revd Robert Maloney

F&F Rota May

Please report any problems with the buildings in April to:

Ann Jones: 01789 266177 / 07580557163

or

Brian Douglas 01789 296290 / 07899777432

Flower Rota

5th April	Easter (Ileen)
19th April	Kirsty
3rd May	Jill & Rob

Link

Because of the way our Sunday services are now structured, the editors have decided that the physical copies of Link magazine will be available on the 1st Sunday of each month rather than the last Sunday of the month. The electronic version may well be available before then. When there are 5 Sundays in the month the Link will be available on that 5th Sunday.

The May edition of Link will be published on the 3rd of May.

The deadline for submission to the next edition is Monday 27th April.

Please send us your articles, pictures, humour etc.

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**RIDING LIGHTS THEATRE COMPANY
PRESENTS**

NIGHT FALLS

BY PAUL BIRCH



**"RIDING LIGHTS
WORKS MIRACLES"**

The Stage

**Tuesday 31st March & Wednesday 1st April
at 7.30pm at 2.30pm**

In the Bear Pit Theatre

**United Reformed Church Stratford-upon-Avon,
Rother Street, CV37 6LU**



To book ring 0333 666 3366 or use the QR code above