

twelvebaskets



ORDINARY 25C

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

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Ordinary 25 - Year C
18th September 2022



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

595 STF – Lord, we have come at your own invitation OR

20 STF – Be still

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

320 STF – Father, whose everlasting love OR

470 STF – Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided

Readings: Jeremiah 8:18-9:1; Psalm 79:1-9; 1 Timothy 2:1-7; Luke 16:1-13

Hymn:

660 STF – Called by Christ to be disciples OR

413 STF – Send down the fire of your justice

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

566 STF – Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee OR

668 STF – Teach me, my God and King, in all things thee to see

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

503 STF – Love divine, all loves excelling OR

563 STF – O Jesus, I have promised to serve you to the end

Blessing

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Call to worship

We gather, Lord God, to encounter you.
We gather, Christ Jesus, to discover more of your lessons for us today.
We gather, Spirit of God, to be moved and transformed by your presence.
Move amongst us, as we gather, God of this moment.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

595 STF – Lord, we have come at your own invitation OR

20 STF – Be still

Opening Prayers

Lord Jesus Christ,
Accepting your open invitation, we come into your presence and lay down our
baggage.

We don't even have to unpack, for all of it is known to you:

The pain we have felt
The pain we have caused
The difficult conversations
Our regrets
Our fears
The hopes we daren't speak aloud

We give you thanks, for you offer to share the load,
In the peace of this moment, may we hear your words of forgiveness, feel your
comforting arms around us, and simply know you are near

Accepting us as we are
Loving us as we are
Holding us
Giving us a place of safety, just to *be*,

Gently challenging us to keep moving forwards, strengthened by your spirit.

Lord Jesus Christ, we love you

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Emma Dobson

All Age Talk

One of the ways we learn to follow God, is by praying. The way we pray helps to shape how we think about the world and if we only ever pray for ourselves, it might just make us more selfish. Sometimes, we treat prayer like a shopping list, where we just ask God for the things we want. The story is told of a boy who, before going up to say his prayers at night, asks everyone in his family: 'I'm just off to pray, does anybody want anything?'

This is not how our relationship with God works and this morning we are just going to learn a simple five-fingered prayer to help us pray more meaningfully. As this shows, we are still allowed to pray for ourselves (in fact, Jesus encourages it when he teaches the disciples the Lord's Prayer) but we should make sure we are not praying out of selfishness. Rather, we pray out of love.

So, we are going to use one of our hands to help us pray. Hold one of your hands out in front of you, with the fingers pointing up to the sky, and the thumb pointing at you, like this...

- We begin by looking at our thumb which, when we hold our hands in this way, is closest to us. So let us pray for those closest to us, our friends and family. Let's just be quiet for a moment, and think about our friends and people in our family, especially if there are one or two of them that need our prayers this morning.
[Pause].
- Next, we come to the 'pointing' finger, the one we would use to show someone directions. And as we look at this finger, we take a moment to pray for all those who have 'pointed' us in the right direction over the years: teachers, leaders, Sunday school teachers, parents, etc. Just say a little thank you prayer to God for them right now, and pray that all who are involved in pointing people in the right direction would continue to be good guides.
[Pause].
- The next finger is the middle finger, the tallest finger on the hand. As we look at this finger, we pray for all who are given authority or power. Especially we pray for those in government, our own prime minister and the senior leaders in countries around the world who face difficult decisions about economies, people's lives, war, trade and climate change. We pray that they would have the courage to do the right thing and the grace to use their power to help others.
[Pause].
- Our fourth prayer is while we look at the ring finger, which is the weakest finger on the hand. So, we take this time to pray for the weakest and most vulnerable in our society and our world. We pray for those suffering from physical and mental ill health, for those overlooked by the system, for those living in poverty. Just spend a few moments praying for those whom people call 'weak'.
[Pause].
- Finally, we come to the little finger, the 'pinky'! And now, after we have prayed for our loved ones, our teachers, our leaders and those most in need, only now is it appropriate for us to pray for ourselves. We know we need prayer and we need to find ways to continue to respond to God's love for us by being better people, so we spend a few moments, just praying for ourselves and how we can be Christ's hands and feet in today's world.
[Pause].

Amen.³

Hymn:

320 STF – Father, whose everlasting love OR

470 STF – Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Baker

Readings: Jeremiah 8:18-9:1; Psalm 79:1-9; 1 Timothy 2:1-7; Luke 16:1-13

Hymn:

660 STF – Called by Christ to be disciples OR

413 STF – Send down the fire of your justice

Reflections on the reading

Today's passage from 1 Timothy is written to a new community of faith, who are just starting to get themselves established. Paul is writing to them through his friend Timothy, and spends lots of the letter sharing with them good practices for a community of believers. He talks to them about leadership, and service, godliness, teaching, caring for the vulnerable and avoiding false teaching. But right at the start, the very first thing Paul calls the community to do is learn to pray.

In his instructions about prayer, Paul says that the community should not just be praying for themselves and the things they need, but for everyone. His instructions are that they should pray for all people, as a reminder that God desires everyone to be saved. By prayer, the new and emerging community of believers are to be connected not only to their near neighbours, but their neighbours across the world. So here we have it: at the very heart of being a community of faith is to hold the needs of other people in prayer before God.

What does this look like for us today? As a community of faith living in the 21st century, does this still play a part in our calling? Most worship services in churches, today's included, hold a time of intercessory prayer, where prayers are offered for the church and for the world. I don't know about you, but sometimes I have mixed feelings towards this time of prayer for others. Often, these can feel like really fruitful times of prayer. But at other times, these prayers can feel like we're just reeling off a list of things going wrong with the world, without really connecting to them.

Occasionally, praying for the church and for the world can feel really heavy. It can feel like a heavy burden, to hold the weight of the challenges people are facing in our communities and wider world before God.

Luckily, we are not the first people to be called to this kind of prayer, and neither were the community in 1 Timothy. Our other readings today show us something of genuine and faithful prayer from thousands of years ago. There are two prominent themes from these readings that say something about what it looks like to pray for others before God: firstly, that God joins in our lament, and secondly, that we are called to recognise our complicity in the challenges of the world we long to fix. In our reading from Jeremiah 8, we hear the prophet Jeremiah praying a prayer of lament. A prayer of lament is a prayer of loss, sadness or regret, and we hear this in Jeremiah's prayer. The prayer comes as the people of Israel are facing their enemy approaching. They are scared, and Jeremiah's words capture this pain. His grief and fear is so deep that he prays he might become a fountain of tears, that all he would be is weeping.

Sometimes when we pray prayers of intercession, it can feel like the most important part is to ask for solutions. We turn to God and we pray that conflict might become peace, that politicians might listen and that illness will be healed. But what would it look like to follow Jeremiah's lead, and to open up all of our lament in prayer? Jeremiah doesn't ask for solutions here, but simply holds out his pain before God. Before anything, he takes time to recognise his sadness at the injustice present in the world.

And, perhaps the most significant thing shown in this passage, is that God joins him there too. Lots of people have commented that the voice of some of these verses might not be Jeremiah's, but God's. In the passage, we hear a voice cry:

"Hark, the cry of *my poor people*
from far and wide in the land!"

And

"For the hurt of *my poor people I am hurt,*
I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me".

Perhaps what we hear in this passage is more than a prophet praying out lament for his community, but God stepping in to join him in his grief. Together, God and the prophet Jeremiah cry out in lament, and call out for healing. Here, we are reminded that praying intercession for the challenges and pain of the world is not simply a call to ask God for a magic fix, but it is joining with God in lament from brokenness, and longing for God's healing together. We are called to encounter the pain of injustice, of conflict and of grief, and know that God stands with us.

Our reading from Psalm 79 contains lament too. Here, the psalmist is distressed by the behaviours of God's people. They haven't honored God and they have favored injustice, engaging in conflict and warfare. Crucially, the writer of the psalm knows that he has been part of this too. He laments that his people are being mocked by their neighbours for everything that they have done. Injustice has not only been brought upon them, but by their own actions. The psalmist calls on God to pour out anger on the people, because they have not turned to God or relied on God for their livelihoods. The psalmist knows that he cannot confront the brokenness and injustice he sees before him without recognising the part he and his people have played in it. They are not distanced from the pain of the world, but often they are the cause of it too.

When we pray for injustice to be resolved, how often do we encounter our part in both perpetuating and resolving it? It can be scary to confront our role in the challenges we pray for, because in doing so they become not only God's challenges to fix but we play our part in them too. Now, we are not only called to pray for change, but to enact it. Our calling as disciples of Christ to be God's hands and feet on earth becomes very real. As we pray intercession, we are called to recognise our power to intervene, to step in and be part of solutions.

The good news is, we never do this alone. Just as God joins with us in lament, God joins with us in healing. In the psalm, the writer calls for God to pour out anger on the people, because that's what he thinks they deserve. But he soon realises that God will meet their longing not with anger, but with compassion. Towards the end of the passage, he cries out:

“Let your compassion come speedily to meet us,
for we are brought very low.
Help us, O God of our salvation,
for the glory of your name;
deliver us, and forgive our sins,
for your name’s sake.”

As we face up to our complicity in the brokenness of the world, the psalmist shows us how we can turn towards God’s compassion. When we recognise our need to be part of enacting change, we are met with God’s promise of forgiveness and salvation. God promises to deliver us, forgive us and shape us towards salvation. Our prayers for the brokenness of the world might begin in lament, but they do not have to linger there. Each time, they can turn towards God’s healing love. The challenge from these two passages calls us into deeper encounter with God as we pray for the world around us. Our prayers of intercession are not just lists of problems or a burden of heavy responsibility. They are an invitation, to join with God in lament at the brokenness of the world, to encounter our complicity and to be empowered by God’s offer of forgiveness and compassion to play our part in restoration.⁴

Hymn:

566 STF – Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee OR
668 STF – Teach me, my God and King, in all things thee to see

Prayers of intercession

As we pray intercession for the world around us today, where do we need to lament with God? Where do we need to recognise our complicity with the injustice present in the world? And where do we need to be empowered by God’s compassion and healing to bring restoration?

Let us pray.

God of compassion

You made your creation with a vision of fullness of life and flourishing for all.

In each of us to see the potential for goodness.

In all creation you see the potential for restoration and regrowth.

We lament that this vision of flourishing is threatened by the brokenness of the world.

We lament that conflict, injustice, pain, grief and suffering limit the potential of your creation.

We lament that fullness for some people is held back by the selfishness of others.

We lament that preventable illness causes people pain.

We lament that we are at war with one another, and that violence is seen as a solution.

We take a moment in silence now to hold a situation of injustice or conflict in our minds.

⁴ Reflection written by the Joint Public Issues Team – find out more here: <https://jpit.uk/>

God of healing, we know that you join with us in lament.
You hold the brokenness of the world in your heart
and long for healing and restoration.

God of forgiveness

We know that we have played our part in the injustice and conflict we see around us.
We confess to the way in which our lives have held up unjust structures,
And our choices have prioritised our needs above the needs of others.

We confess that our lifestyles continue to contribute to climate change.
We confess that we have not always used our money and resources in the service of
others.

We confess that we have not always stood up against racial injustice.

We confess that we have not always welcomed the stranger.

We confess that we have closed the door on those at the margins.

We take a moment in silence now to confess to God where we have played a part in
injustice and conflict.

God of restoration, you meet us with compassion.

You invest your life-changing salvation in us,
that we might be empowered to be agents of change for your kingdom.

Call us into action God, that we might work with you for the healing of your world.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Blessing the offering

Living God, we give you thanks for all we have received and the many blessings we
have received, by grace. We commit these gifts to you and your kingdom, for your
work and the building of a better, safer world.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

503 STF – Love divine, all loves excelling OR

563 STF – O Jesus, I have promised to serve you to the end

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by the Joint Public Issues Team

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

Blessing

Heal us, heavenly Father,
And show us how to be people of healing and wholeness and peace in your world.
Here we go, fill us, by your Spirit, Lord.

Amen.⁷

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker