

# twelvebaskets



## ORDINARY 26C

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

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**Ordinary 26 - Year C**  
25th September 2022



## **Order of Service**

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**55 STF – Immortal, invisible, God only wise OR**

**80 STF – My God, I am thine**

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**545 STF – Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart OR**

**130 STF – We plough the fields, and scatter**

Readings: Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15; Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16; 1 Timothy 6:6-19; Luke 16:19-31

**Hymn:**

**696 STF – For the healing of the nations, Lord we pray with one accord OR**

**701 STF – Heaven shall not wait for the poor to lose their patience**

Reflections on the reading

**Hymn:**

**249 STF – Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love OR**

**256 STF – When I needed a neighbour, were you there?**

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

**459 STF – Captain of Israel's host, and Guide OR**

**725 STF – As the glory of creation**

Blessing

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**Many more resources and inspiration for this week's lectionary, leading worship and other church use are available on [www.theworshipcloud.com](http://www.theworshipcloud.com).**

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## Call to worship

Loving God,  
We are here to worship,  
We are here to immerse ourselves in the river of prayer,  
The lake of love,  
The pool of peace,  
The places of your presence.

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## Hymn:

55 STF – Immortal, invisible, God only wise OR

80 STF – My God, I am thine

## Opening Prayers

We take this time, away from the relentless pace of life:

Away from the everyday stresses, frustrations and endless to-do lists,  
We take this time to sit in your presence, Lord, and just breathe,  
Just be.

We all have our roles to play,  
As parents, friends, neighbours, colleagues, teachers, leaders or companions,  
In this moment, we are simply your children,  
Loved for who we are, just as we are.

In this moment, we find peace and strength,  
We find the comfort and love we need, in exactly the way we need it  
Your love meets us where we are, calls our name and speaks a language we  
understand

Lord, in this moment:

Hold us,  
Accept us,  
Validate us,  
Inspire us,  
Guide us,  
Fill us up,  
Renew us,  
Challenge us,  
Strengthen us

In Jesus' name

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by Emma Dobson

## **We say together the Lord's Prayer**

### **All Age Talk**

I wonder – do you think you make the most of the resources you have available? And, in this sense, we mean the widest possible meaning of ‘resources’ – we mean the things you own, the energy you have, the time you could use, the relationships you are a part of...and anything else you could describe as ‘yours’.

If you've ever played one of those computer games where you have to build a village up into an empire, the question is always: how do you use your resources to achieve the best outcome? Is the wood you have been collecting best used to build a palace for yourself, or an army to defend your community, or a marketplace to enable trade to flourish? These same questions about using resources well keep coming up, and I am encouraging us to ask the same questions about our own resources today.

Could we use what we have to make the world a better, safer, more loving, more fulfilling place?

Jesus was always asking people questions about what they had, and challenging them about how they should be putting that to use. Given Jesus' attitude to wealth and the build up of possessions, he probably wouldn't have approved of the way those computer games develop – the objective of these games is always to become the richest or most powerful player. That doesn't seem to be the Jesus way.

Rather, Jesus invites us to think about how we use the resources we have, how we use our skills, energy and things to help make the world a better place. We'll hear a little bit more about this during our service and as we continue to learn more about how God might be inviting us to be a part of God's family. But, before then, it would be good just to hear some of your thoughts on how we, as a church, or you in your own life – could use our resources to make the world a better place.

What are some of your suggestions?

*[Allow people to share their ideas]*

In the days and weeks ahead, lets reflect on some of these suggestions – and put them into action where we possibly can!

Let us pray,

Loving God, help us to use all that we have for the building of a world that reflects how you would want it be. Help us to listen to the teachings of Jesus and find ways to change our own lives in light of these teachings that we might see your kingdom come, your will be done.<sup>3</sup>

### **Hymn:**

545 STF – Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart OR

130 STF – We plough the fields, and scatter

**Readings:** Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15; Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16; 1 Timothy 6:6-19; Luke 16:19-31

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<sup>3</sup> All Age Talk written by Tim Baker

## Hymn:

696 STF – For the healing of the nations, Lord we pray with one accord OR

701 STF – Heaven shall not wait for the poor to lose their patience

## Reflections on the reading

In the 1980s the Christian drama group ‘Riding Lights’, based in York, published several books of sketches including one based on today’s Gospel reading. It was a short piece of drama intended to shock – and shock it did, if enacted as described. Beginning with its own version of a children’s counting song it invited people to consider a world of:

‘One for you and two for me  
and three for you and more for me...’

Gradually the greed and injustice multiplied and increased; ‘you’ becomes eroded completely from the sharing out, as the refrain changes to

‘more for me and more for me’

until the horrific point at which a destitute beggar is carried in and placed on the dining table of the rich character, amidst the many dishes and fine tableware. It made its point powerfully.

We live in a world of gross injustice – not only between us and faraway nations, but within each community. Each of us has to recognise that we are somewhere on this spectrum of wealth – we might look in one direction and think we have little; compared with the celebrities who frequent our TV screens and even our news stories, our lives may appear modest, simple, frugal even. But if we look in the other direction, at those around the world who live daily with the realities of famine, drought, war and exploitation, or much closer to home and note that perhaps as many as 1 in 5 people in the UK live in poverty<sup>4</sup>... many of us have to recognise that in fact we are rich.

Within the church too our situations vary widely. Indeed, the church remains one of the few places in British society where people with a range of political opinions or economic situations might be found together. Sometimes we may try to ignore this; if we are relatively wealthy, we may assume that everyone else has the same resources that we have; if we are relatively poor, we may give quite a bit of our energy to trying to hide that fact and present an image we think others will find acceptable. Perhaps we need to take the words of Paul writing to Timothy and of Jesus addressing a socially diverse crowd more seriously and discover how best to live with whatever level of wealth we have.

Like the Riding Lights sketch, the parable Jesus tells is shocking. As we consider the context in which the story is told, it is helpful to note verses 14-15, a little earlier in the passage; ‘*The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all this, and they ridiculed him. So he said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of others; but God knows your hearts; for what is prized by human beings is an abomination in the sight of God.”*’ So Jesus is seeking to make the Pharisees examine themselves. Perhaps he hopes that their hearts might be softened and they may recognise the paths to true life and love.

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<sup>4</sup> according to figures from the Quaker Social Action research project in 2020.

Jesus describes a scenario of extreme wealth and extreme poverty existing in very close proximity. Dives (whose very name means rich) is at the top of the social scale whilst Lazarus (a name which could be translated, 'God help me') lies in abject poverty at his gate. However, death brings a major reversal to their fortunes; Lazarus is indeed helped by God and is taken into the presence of Abraham himself. Meanwhile Dives ends up in Hades, in hell, suffering torment from the flames. With all the sense of entitlement of some very rich people he cries out for help to Abraham. Even death and punishment seem not to have dented Dives' sense of status - in suggesting that Lazarus might be sent to cool his tongue it is clear that he still considers himself someone to be served and Lazarus someone who might offer that service!

Abraham's reply is firm – Dives has had his chance of good things whilst Lazarus suffered only evil and there was nothing to prevent Dives sharing his good fortune then. However, now that they are in the afterlife, Lazarus cannot do as Dives wishes, even should he want to, for they are on opposite sides of 'a great chasm' which cannot be crossed from either side. If he can't help himself, Dives' next concern is to help those closest to him; can his own family be spared the torment he now suffers? This too, Abraham explains, is impossible – the brothers have had their chance to understand what is important in life – Moses and the prophets explained all that – and have chosen to ignore it. Dives persists, claiming that the words of someone who had died would be taken much more seriously, but again Abraham is obdurate – *'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'* This last comment certainly sounds as though it may be intended to reinforce the early Christian witness that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead and therefore his words should be regarded but may still be ignored.

Dives is condemned by his own actions and self-centeredness to spend eternity in agony. I don't think any of us are supposed to come away from reading this parable feeling anything other than uncomfortable. We may not live at the level of Dives, but there are always those around us to whom we could be more generous. So we turn to Paul's letter to Timothy with eagerness – how does this great Christian apostle treat the subjects of wealth and poverty?

He begins by talking about 'contentment', suggesting that as long as we have food and clothing, we should be able to be content. We may find this a helpful base level. We are not called upon as Christians to tell those living in poverty to 'be content'.

*[Could include this short story in the first person from my time as a Mission partner in the South Caribbean:*

'When we lived and worked with the Methodist Church in St. Vincent in the 1990s I was often enraged by comments from tourists whom we encountered; as they watched the local children on the beach in their ragged clothes finding endless amusement from an old ball or a car tyre; creating cricket stumps and bats out of coconut branches, the visitors might say, 'Look at those children, they're poor but they're happy' with the implication that no more needed to be done to correct global injustice. On brave days I might engage in conversation with them, suggesting that yes, the desire for joy and fulness of life was strong in these indomitable children, able to discover fun in simple ways during an hour or so at the beach, but perhaps their lives would look different to the onlookers if they were to see them at break of

day, trekking miles into the surrounding countryside to attend to animals before school, or to see the meagre meals on their tables or the crowded and possibly insanitary conditions of their housing.]

Contentment is here placed in opposition to the way in which many respond to wealth, succumbing to *'senseless and harmful desire that plunge people into ruin and destruction'*. It's back to the 'more for me and more for me' approach. Wealth, like sugar, alcohol and drugs, has an addictive quality which can take over our lives. Paul uses a lovely piece of irony in the opening verse employing the phrase *'great gain'* to apply not to the gain of material goods, but to godliness and contentment. And so to the most famous (and frequently misquoted) verse in this passage, *'For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil'*. Not money itself, not necessarily, but the love of money. John Wesley held firmly to this understanding, and the ethos he preached was (simply put) to 'earn as much as you can in order to save as much as you can so you can give as much as you can'. Although his income increased significantly during his lifetime as he became a well-known preacher, his own outgoings hardly changed – he refused to fall under the spell of social climbing, which seems to be what Paul here suggests can lead people away from faith and cause great suffering. For Paul, the suffering is not confined to punishment after death, but starts in the here and now when the love of money takes over.

*'As for you'*, Paul writes to his young protegee, Timothy, *'shun all this... take hold of eternal life'*. It's a bold, counter-cultural instruction, *'Shun all this'*. Dare we? The qualities which Paul lists for us to pursue instead have great beauty – *'righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness'*... But Paul is not pretending that is an easy route to take; and he goes on immediately to talk about the life of faith as a *'good fight'*, but one that brings about a reward which does not perish, as riches do, rather that of *'eternal life'*. At times, we may be called to 'speak truth to power' and challenge those who are rich, but perhaps above all this advice is to be addressed to ourselves; if we are engaged in a fight, it is not a fight against the rich or powerful, but against the desires within ourselves to be rich and powerful. Our calling, like Timothy's is to live out the upside-down life of the Kingdom of God which offers a challenge to the values of our society whilst at the same time it stores up real treasure and demonstrates *'that life that really is life'*. The celebrity culture has got it wrong – real life is not to be found in riches, but in godliness – can we live that out in the coming week?<sup>5</sup>

### **Hymn:**

249 STF – Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love OR

256 STF – When I needed a neighbour, were you there?

### **Prayers of intercession**

Response if wished: May your kingdom come – **may your will be done.**

Generous God – we begin today by praying for ourselves, for you have called us to become like you and we know that sometimes we fail to live generously... Stir our hearts afresh that we may shun our greed and discover your treasure store of love.

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<sup>5</sup> Reflection written by Jill Baker

May your kingdom come – **may your will be done.**

Generous God – we are moved by all that we see and hear of global poverty and we pray today for all, both near and far, who don't have enough food, or access to clean water, or adequate housing... Strengthen the work of all agencies striving for justice.

May your kingdom come – **may your will be done.**

Generous God – we know that many around us and around the world are suffering and we pray today for all who are ill in body, mind or spirit... Give your spirit of healing to all who care for those around them, at home, in hospitals and hospices, in refugee camps and war zones.

May your kingdom come – **may your will be done.**

Generous God – we consider how you must grieve over the abuse of wealth and power, causing oppression and exploitation to so many of your children... Give your wisdom and compassion to all who rule and make decisions which affect the lives of others.

May your kingdom come – **may your will be done.**

Generous God – we note that we are called to be your body on earth and so we pray today for the church around the world; our local congregation, our national denominations and your global body... Renew us by your Spirit that we may speak for those with no voice, stand up for those with no hope and struggle for those with no future until that day when you will bring justice and freedom to all.

May your kingdom come – **may your will be done.**

Amen.<sup>6</sup>

**We will now take up the offering.**

### **Blessing the offering**

Gracious God, we give you thanks for everything we have received and set about seeking to put our gifts to good use, and the building of your kingdom here on earth.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.<sup>7</sup>

### **Hymn:**

459 STF – Captain of Israel's host, and Guide OR

725 STF – As the glory of creation

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<sup>6</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Jill Baker

<sup>7</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker



## **Blessing**

Let us go out and do good, let us be rich in kindness, mercy, love and generosity.  
Let us be ready to share, and live in peace with all.  
The peace of the Lord be always with you, and also with you.  
Amen.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker