

twelvebaskets



ORDINARY 34C

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

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Ordinary 34 - Year C
20th November 2022



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

331 STF – King of kings, majesty OR

63 STF – Over all the earth, you reign on high

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

15 STF – The splendour of the King OR

318 STF – Christ, our King before creation

Readings: Jeremiah 23:1-6; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43

Hymn:

342 STF – All hail the power of Jesu's name! OR

57 STF – Let all the world in every corner sing

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

317 STF – At the name of Jesus OR

327 STF – Jesus is King and I will extol him

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

287 STF – When I survey the wondrous cross OR

353 STF – Jesus is Lord! Creation's voice proclaims it

Blessing

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Call to worship

As the darkness of winter draws in,
As the coldest time of the year approaches,
As we close our doors and turn up our heaters,
Come, Lord of light,
Come, God of the warm embrace,
Come to us, Immanuel, God with us.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

331 STF – King of kings, majesty OR
63 STF – Over all the earth, you reign on high

Opening Prayers

Let us pray:

Into your presence we come.
The Servant King,
Prince of Peace,
Lamb of God.

Into your presence we come with our heads bowed,
our hearts open,
tongues stilled,
and our ears alert to hearing from you.

Into your presence we come,

we long to meet with you today.
Into your presence we come alongside one another,
strangers, friends, and family.

Into your presence we come with all our hearts' desires and troubles.
In a moment of quiet, we hand over all that is weighing us down this day,
Handing them into your presence.
[Stillness].

'Your sins are forgiven' says the Lord. In your presence, we are set free.

Into your presence we come,
please meet with us today.

Amen.²

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Sheila Matthews

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

We've made it friends! It's nearly the end of 2022!! Yay!! It's been a long year full of challenges, but we got this far! Only Advent and Christmas left now! Perfect time to check on what we have left to do this year!

[Have a list either on a screen or in paper form. Go through it slowly making comments and encouraging comments from the congregation. Examples to include?]

- Christmas Meal plans?
- Christmas Shopping?
- Advent Calendars ready?
- Christmas Services all sorted?
- Found the Christmas Decorations?
- New Year's Resolutions?

[Pause on the last one.]

Ah! What was my resolution this year?

[Share it, did you keep it? If you didn't, be honest and share if appropriate]

What were some of yours?

[Get feedback from the congregation]

With all the business of Christmas, work, school, day to day life we sometimes forget at this time of year to look back on the year gone by. The resolutions we made at the start of the year were promises we made to our future selves to do or not do something. We sometimes forget those resolutions as the year goes by. But we are a community, and communities are great at helping others. As we enter Christmas with all the hectic chaos it brings, why don't we try and keep our resolutions, and make a new one for this season: Why don't we resolve to help one another?

A small resolution, but it can have a great impact on others if we all help. We can help others in the same way we ask God each week to help us when we say the Lord's Prayer. And then when Christmas is all over, let us take a moment to think back on whether we completed our resolutions this year, and what resolutions we can make for 2023.

Loving God,

Help us stand resolute in helping one another in the coming Christmas season. May we be loving, understanding and helpful, willing to help when asked and be open to asking for help if we need it.

Amen.³

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Annan-Hood

Hymn:

15 STF – The splendour of the King OR
318 STF – Christ, our King before creation

Readings: Jeremiah 23:1-6; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43

Hymn:

342 STF – All hail the power of Jesu's name! OR
57 STF – Let all the world in every corner sing

Reflections on the readings

It's nearly here friends! Next week is Advent Sunday, the beginning of the season of waiting, when we prepare for Christ's coming at Christmas. He is coming!

This Sunday, the one before Advent, is called in some traditions 'Christ the King', and several of our hymns this morning have reflected the kingly nature of Christ's ministry here on earth, echoing Jesus' own reflections on what it means to be a king as he stands in Pilate's halls. This reading, coming just before we embark on the familiar Christmas story, also reminds us of the end of Jesus' ministry even as we are about to begin his story again.

This contrast helps us to sing 'O Come, O Come Immanuel', not just in a cosy, festive, Christmas-is-coming sort of way – but to recognise the miracle of Immanuel, God with us in all God's fullness. That miracle included and led to Jesus' betrayal by his own people and death on the cross, but also to the remarkable resurrection and recognition of Christ as King. This Sunday, we remember that the statement 'God with us', is a remarkable, life-changing truth, that takes us right to the other end of Jesus' life, and his death upon the cross, as depicted in our gospel reading for today.

On that note that goes about Jesus' head, Pilate has someone attach a sign that reads: 'This is the King of the Jews'. This always seems like an incongruous thing to hang above the head of someone being executed like a common criminal, but it reveals something of the tension within Pilate. He knew he was making a mistake, but he didn't know how not to make that mistake – I wonder if you've ever been there, where temptation and / or fear stand in the way of doing the right thing, even when you really want to?

One of the amazing things about the crucifixion story is that it goes ahead. That Jesus sees it through. His prayer at Gethsemane is the prayer any one of us would surely pray in that position: essentially, 'don't make me do this'. And yet he sees it through to the end, he is prepared to do the hardest, most difficult thing. Can we show those same levels of courage today as we head into the Advent and Christmas season? Can we be brave?

Perhaps some of you will know the story of the Zimbabwean cricketer, Henry Olonga. He recently appeared on an interview on All We Can's social media (you can look it up if you have Facebook or YouTube, it was the episode of their live broadcast '1.17' for September, just search for @allwecanuk on either of those websites) and his story is a helpful reminder of this courage. Henry is a Christian and when he was playing for Zimbabwe at the Cricket World Cup in 2003, he and his teammate Andy Flower (who has since been the coach of the England cricket team) organised a protest against the injustices in their own country. Henry and Andy wore black arm bands and released a statement saying they were doing so to mourn the 'death of democracy' and the mistreatment of people in their homeland by Robert Mugabe and his regime.

They had been warned that this might not be particularly well received by folks 'back home' and such was the case. The Mugabe regime issued death threats against them both and Henry went from being an international opening fast bowler to a fugitive. Warned not to return to his homeland (perhaps with echoes of the story of the Magi, warned not to return to Herod, that we will read about soon), Henry became an exile and eventually found safety in the UK, where he spent the next few years, met his now wife and started a family. It was a scary time, but also a time when Henry can testify to God's goodness and a sense that God was with him.

Despite all that he knew could go wrong, and all the warnings, and the fact that actually not a great deal changed in Zimbabwe in the short-term, Henry felt compelled to action. His courage was able to overcome his fear and he was able to do the difficult thing, in order to stand up for what is right. What he communicated so clearly on that interview with All We Can was how this was absolutely a faith-based decision from him, and it was God's presence with him that gave him this courage.

On this Christ the King Sunday, when we look forward with anticipation to all the magic and delight of the Christmas season, may we also see the pain and injustice in our world. May we acknowledge that there is much that is not 'as it should be'. And may we play our part in seeking to stand up for those who do not have a voice, to defend the cause of the weak, the vulnerable, the oppressed, the poor. Jesus' ministry showed us how to do that, we just have to be brave enough to follow.

When we do stand up and act for justice, we do not need to do so alone, and we are joining with a 'great crowd of witnesses' who are tackling injustice in their way right now, and across the whole of human history. People like Henry Olonga, but also people like Martin Luther King, Desmond Tutu, Mother Teresa, and thousands of names that people will never know or write books about – but who have changed the world in their own way.

All We Can's live broadcast, which Henry Olonga was part of, is called 1.17, in honour of a verse from today's Epistle – Colossians 1:17, where Paul writes that 'in Christ all things hold together'. It is that simple truth that inspired those broadcasts and that community of people who celebrate 'holding together' across time and space online, throughout the lockdowns here in the UK but also further afield, connecting with brothers and sisters around the world.

That simple verse counts among many people's favourites in the New Testament – and it's easy to see why, isn't it? The beautiful reminder that Christ is holding all things together. That despite how it might seem – that things are falling apart, that our world is more divided and broken than ever, that people and politicians and groups are building bigger and bigger walls...despite all that, there is a force, an energy, a person at the heart of the universe who is calling all things together, who is interested in unity, and love, and shalom. We call that person Christ.

This verse is part of the tradition that some theologians call Paul's vision of the 'cosmic Christ'. This understanding that Jesus is so much more than a very interesting and gifted preacher and healer who walked around in Palestine 2,000 years ago. That same Christ is also part of the Godhead, is eternal, has been part of all things since before the dawn of time, and will go on existing long after our world has ceased to be. Christ is part of the cosmos, as well as part of human history. That's what makes Christmas so incredible: that – as Wesley puts it – 'our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man.'

That's where our courage can come from. Not a distant God who demands too much of us, but a God who is present, who is alongside, who contracts the essence of the divine in order to have a human experience. That's the invitation of this Advent and Christmas season: prepare a space in your heart for that God, the God who is infinite and yet infinitely interested in you, to come and be born again in you. Find yourself infinitely connected with the cosmos, through the Christ who is King and baby and cosmic, all at once.

Let's pause for a moment, and then have some conversation with the person sitting next to you – see what you make of all this. Is it helpful? Have you heard it before? Is there something in what we've heard today that you can take home with you and apply this week? Spend a moment talking, if these questions are helpful, then use them, if not, talk about something else!

- 1) Is there something you need to find the courage in your heart to do? What is stopping you from being brave and doing the 'right thing'?
- 2) What is your favourite thing about the Jesus story at Christmas time? Is there something that you might find particularly helpful to reflect on this year?
- 3) In what way are you helping all things to 'hold together'? Are you an agent of togetherness?

[Give people space for the conversation, it might be helpful to pause them after a few minutes and remind them of the questions or move amongst the groups checking people are okay and feeling safe and able to share.

When the conversation is drawing to a close, bring people back together and offer this short prayer:]

God who came, God who is coming, God who comes amongst us right now,
We thank you that you are holding all things together through Jesus the Christ,
and inspiring us by your Spirit.

Show us how to be a part of that big story this Advent season. Help us to make a space in our hearts for your incarnation, your arrival, your birth. In the name of the one who is King, and baby, and cosmic, Jesus the Christ, we pray. Amen.⁴

Hymn:

317 STF – At the name of Jesus OR

327 STF – Jesus is King and I will extol him

Prayers of intercession

For our prayers of intercession, which are based on Psalm 46, let's use this simple response:

The Lord almighty is with us

Our refuge and strength

Loving God,

You are our source of strength and place of refuge, you are with us whenever we face trouble and hardships.

We pray for people in our communities, families and wider circles that are finding life difficult. We pray for the people who need a reminder that you are with them, that you can be their strength when they feel weak. We pray for the people we know that are sick and in need of healing [*say names if appropriate*].

We ask, Lord, that you will be ever-present with the ones who desperately need you now.

The Lord almighty is with us

Our refuge and strength

Loving God,

We know we do not need to fear but sometimes it is hard to do this. The world has much that makes us afraid. We see the climate crisis, increases in poverty, injustice, and inequality continuing and we can sometimes feel helpless. We long to see your rivers and streams of justice flowing; a strengthening of your people in order to stand tall and be bold in doing your kingdom work.

We pray for the governments of the world, especially our own, to have an awareness of how to lead with integrity and moral fortitude, to seek the best for the most vulnerable in society and be willing to listen. Help us, Lord, to be ready to follow you where you lead us to make our communities what you desire them to be.

The Lord almighty is with us

Our refuge and strength

⁴ Reflection written by Tim Baker

Loving God,

You ask us to be still and know that you are God. In this moment of silence we will stop and sit in your presence and allow what is on our hearts and minds to be raised.

[Keep silence]

Lord, we thank you for the good gifts you have given us, for the eternal hope we have in you. We thank you that you never leave us even when we turn our faces from you. We pray Lord for you to draw us closer to you. Help us to be the people you have made us to be. Guide us, redeem us, and teach us your ways.

The Lord almighty is with us

Our refuge and strength

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

As we come towards the end of November, and look forward to the season of Advent, we give you thanks for all the wonderful gifts we have received – help us to use all that we have and are to build your kin-dom here.

Amen.

Hymn:

287 STF – When I survey the wondrous cross OR

353 STF – Jesus is Lord! Creation's voice proclaims it

Blessing

We go from this place, inspired by your message of inclusivity Lord God.

We go to welcome all people, to make space for all things,

We go to do all that we can, in the name of love.

Amen.⁶

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Sheila Matthews

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker