

# twelvebaskets



## ORDINARY 20A

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

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**Ordinary 20 - Year A**  
20th August 2023



## **Order of Service**

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**425 STF – God of forgiveness, your people you freed OR**

**652 STF – Lord, we come to ask your healing**

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**416 STF – There's a wideness in God's mercy OR**

**421 STF – Empty, broken, here I stand, Kyrie eleison**

Readings: Genesis 45:1-15; Psalm 133; Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32; Matthew 15: 21-28

**Hymn:**

**611 STF – Brother, sister, let me serve you OR**

**685 STF – In Christ there is no east or west**

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**409 STF – Let us build a house where love can dwell OR**

**320 STF – Father, whose everlasting love**

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

**649 STF – God! When human bonds are broken OR**

**277 STF – My song is love unknown**

Blessing

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The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

**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**

We have been called, and we have come.  
We have been summoned, and we are here.  
We have found the courage to join you in worship, once more, our Lord and our God.  
We have come.  
Come amongst us, by your Spirit.  
Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## **Hymn:**

425 STF – God of forgiveness, your people you freed OR  
652 STF – Lord, we come to ask your healing

## **Opening Prayers**

Father God,

You are worthy of our praise.

We thank you for all that you have done in our lives this week.

We are sorry for the times we have not been like your son Jesus Christ, who you sent down to earth to enable a relationship between us.

We ask that you empower our worship with your Spirit, fill our hearts with your love and grace, and open our ears to your word.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

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

## **All Age Talk**

Watch the Methodist Schools video song 'The world is my parish' - [YouTube](#)

AND/OR

Begin by noticing some of the ways in which members of the congregation are different from each other... height, age, hair colour (or amount!), skin colour, languages spoken, abilities etc. etc.

What is the same about everyone... all are human beings, all are loved by God and part of God's family?

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

<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by Georgie Blyth

You could go on to make as long a list as possible of different sorts of human beings... any answers are acceptable... different races, colours, languages, sizes but, as with the congregation, all are human, all are loved by God, all are part of the same family.

Take a moment to notice our togetherness, our connection.

Let us pray,

God of all grace, come amongst us and remind us how connected we are, how united, how that which divides us is smaller and less than what brings us together.

Amen.<sup>3</sup>

**Hymn:**

416 STF – There's a wideness in God's mercy OR

421 STF – Empty, broken, here I stand, Kyrie eleison

**Readings:** Genesis 45:1-15; Psalm 133; Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32; Matthew 15: 21-28

**Hymn:**

611 STF – Brother, sister, let me serve you OR

685 STF – In Christ there is no east or west

**Reflections on the readings**

I wonder how you respond to the old axiom, “Blood is thicker than water”? That may depend on whether or not you have any blood relations... or perhaps on how well you get on with them! Similarly it may depend on how important friendships, or non-blood family ties, have been in your life... We all have different backgrounds and circumstances and we need to recognise how we have been shaped by our own experiences and be willing, perhaps, to let go of long-held ways of thinking, which may not stand up to scrutiny in the light of the good news of Jesus. So let's come to these passages with an open mind and hear what God might want to say to us, today, through them.

We begin with just one episode from a family saga which took place more than three thousand years ago, but which would make as gripping a soap opera storyline as anything we see on our television today. You will probably remember how the Israelite patriarch, Jacob, showed favouritism to his two youngest sons, Joseph and Benjamin, because they were the sons of his favourite wife, Rachel. What seeds of hatred, violence and disruption he sowed... Under his father's favour, Joseph became obnoxious and his brothers sold him into slavery, telling their father he had been killed by a wild animal. Ending up in Egypt, Joseph eventually became the favourite there too – it seems he had a peculiar charm about him – and through his God-given ability to interpret dreams, saved the nation from starvation by instructing them to store up crops from seven good years of harvest, before seven years of famine hit. It's all a bit complicated, but you may well know the story, thanks to Andrew Lloyd-Webber and

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

Tim Rice and the musical 'Joseph and his Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat' which may not be 100% theologically sound but does tell the story well!

We join that story today when Joseph's long-estranged brothers are before him for the second time. Hearing that food is available in Egypt their father has already sent some of the brothers to buy food, now all eleven are back, as Joseph has insisted that his full-brother Benjamin comes too. Finally he is ready to reveal his identity to his brothers, who have not recognised him. It's a moment of high emotion... joy certainly, but dismay and fear too on the part of the brothers. How might Joseph seek revenge on these men who sold him as a slave when he was little more than a boy, now that he is the one with power? Immediately Joseph allays these fears – he sees their actions as having been part of the design of God to send him to Egypt to save life.

We may want to pause here and ask a few questions about this understanding of God and how God works – just because Joseph interprets life in a certain way doesn't mean we have to agree. An alternative approach might be to see God's redemptive hand at work, bringing good out of the evil of family rivalry and violence.

Be that as it may, this is clearly a scene of great importance; after years of living - and thriving - among a foreign people, Joseph is once more surrounded by those with whom he shares a blood relationship and that matters to him. Of course it does. His first question is about his beloved father – is he still alive? As we know, this family will go on to be the foundation of the Israelite nation, the people of God. We cannot dismiss this family, with its strong blood ties, as unimportant. The psalm for today shares similar sentiments, 'How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in harmony'. Perhaps today we need to consider any folk to whom we are related by blood; how are those family relationships? Are there words we need to say, words of apology or of forgiveness, of compassion or of sympathy? Do we need to work to ensure that we are living in harmony with our kindred?

But the two passages from the New Testament require us to go deeper than that, and wider too. These blood ties shaped the Jewish nation and their sense of identity as the people of God for centuries. Again perhaps we have to pause and say, just because that's how it happened doesn't necessarily mean that's what God intended... The ongoing problems in the Middle East have their roots in an over-emphasis on racial identity which, whilst clearly a key understanding in the Old Testament, is not the only narrative to be found in scripture, and which begins to be seriously challenged when Jesus comes on the scene. The Gospel passage for today is notorious amongst preachers because it's quite a challenge to explain why it's okay that Jesus calls a woman a dog! Let's see this story as a vital bridge between the total focus on the blood ties of Judaism and a broader understanding of the family of Christ, united not by blood (at least not by our own blood).

Jesus in this story seems to be grappling with that himself. When a woman who is not Jewish asks him for help, he initially keeps silent, seemingly ignoring her, perhaps preferring silence to refusing help. But the shouting continues, this is a desperate woman, pleading for the life of her daughter, she's not about to give up and go away, however much the disciples wish she would. Maybe Jesus wishes that too – he seems to be thinking aloud as he says, perhaps only intending the disciples to hear, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel'. Is Jesus wondering what to do, how to react to this foreigner, how to reconcile her moving plight with his own understanding of his mission?

She leaves him no option of turning away, for she kneels right in front of him and begs for help. Jesus again thinks aloud (perhaps); 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs'. Does he think his power to heal has limits? That it might run

out? That there may not be enough for everyone if he starts healing whoever comes? We can't know exactly why Jesus spoke in this way, but we do know that the response of the woman caused him to rethink. She doesn't raise any objection to being called a dog – sad to say she was probably used to that from Jewish men - but she points out that even dogs are allowed the leftovers. Jesus looks and sees faith; perhaps in her words, perhaps in her eyes and her face, and he responds, speaking words of healing which instantaneously have their effect; her daughter is healed of the demon which had possessed her.

It's a remarkable story and one on which many commentaries have been written and many sermons preached, for it is, perhaps, a vital stepping-stone from one way of thinking to another. Maybe we too hear the challenge to consider our own preconceived ideas. Have we turned away from helping someone because they are not 'one of us'? Not a blood relation, perhaps, or not of our economic class, or social group, or colour of skin? Or they have different views from us on things that matter, carbon footprint, gay rights, feminism, political persuasion? Do we need to recognise, and perhaps, like Jesus, say aloud what is holding us back and then look again and see the humanity, see the image of God, see the faith in the face of another, and change the way in which we respond?

The passage from Romans develops this a little further. Paul is writing to a church which is largely made up of converted Jews, but which is having to recognise that there are others, from outside Judaism, who are coming to faith in Christ. How can that be? What can that mean? Does it mean that God no longer sees the Jewish nation as a chosen people, indeed, has God abandoned them all together and moved on? It seems they are falling into the trap of making God's love "too narrow" (as the hymn puts it). They limit God to being an 'either/or' God... a big mistake, for God is always 'both/and'. Methodism is built upon a series of four short statements often known as the 'Four Alls'; All need to be saved, All can be saved, All can know they are saved, All can be saved to the uttermost. Since the days of John Wesley and his mission to those neglected by the established church, we have prided ourselves on an inclusion which we see in the gospel of Jesus and in the transformed community of the church. God's mercy, Paul repeats to the Romans, and perhaps we need to hear it too, is for all, always for all.

So we've moved away from 'blood is thicker than water' to begin to grasp something of God's inexhaustible love, grace and mercy for the whole human race. That's the premise on which God acts; nothing less is required of us.<sup>4</sup>

### **Hymn:**

409 STF – Let us build a house where love can dwell OR

320 STF – Father, whose everlasting love

### **Prayers of intercession**

*You may wish to play the tune to 'We lay our broken world' (StF 718) in the background or in the pauses as this prayer is based on the hymn.*

Lord, we lay our broken world at your feet. We pray for people living in poverty in our country and around the world. For those haunted by fear, oppressed by power or hate. For areas where conflict and war are in their homes and outside their doors.

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<sup>4</sup> Reflection written by Jill Baker

*In a moment of quiet offer your own personal prayers for the world.*

*[pause]*

Lord, we bring you our broken towns. We ask for compassion and the courage to show this to our Neighbours. We ask that you tell us how best to serve your community and equip us with the skills needed to do this.

*In a moment of quiet offer your own personal prayers for your community*

*[pause]*

Lord, we bring our broken lives. Those who are sick, broken and bruised. Those who have wandered far from you and those who need to know your presence right now. Those who are known to us and those who are only known to you. We ask that you heal those who need to be healed, aid those who need your help, and carry those who are too weak to carry themselves.

*In a moment of quiet offer your own personal prayer for your loved ones*

*[pause]*

Lord, we bring our broken selves. We ask you to fill us with your grace and peace. In moments where we are confused, we ask for clarity. In moments that we are tired we ask for energy. In moments that we feel overwhelmed we ask for peace.

*In a moment of quiet offer your own personal prayer for yourself*

*[pause]*

Lord, we offer these prayers to you. Fix what is broken and breathe life anew. Fill us with Your love as we trust in you.

Amen.<sup>5</sup>

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

Take these gifts, O Lord, and use them to create a world where there is justice. Take these gifts, O Lord, and use us to make the most of them, to plant seeds of hope and new potential everywhere we are and with everyone we meet.

Amen.<sup>6</sup>

### **Hymn:**

649 STF – God! When human bonds are broken OR

277 STF – My song is love unknown

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<sup>5</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Georgie Blyth

<sup>6</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker

## **Blessing**

Go in grace, and know that you are called,  
Go in love, to find that calling and pursue it,  
Go in the Spirit of the Living God, to grow and learn and be transformed,  
Seeking justice in our world, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.<sup>7</sup>

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