

twelvebaskets



ORDINARY 22A

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

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Ordinary 22 - Year A
3rd September 2023



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

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

20 STF – Be still for the presence of the Lord

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

87 STF – Praise to the Living God! OR

51 STF – Great is thy faithfulness

Readings: Exodus 3:1-15; Romans 12:9-21; Matthew 16:21-28

Hymn:

158 STF – Lord, you sometimes speak in wonders OR

272 STF – From heaven you came, helpless babe

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

615 STF – Let love be real, in giving and receiving OR

674 STF – Would I have answered when you called, 'Come follow, follow me!'

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

504 STF – May the mind of Christ my Saviour OR

274 STF – Jesus Christ, I think upon your sacrifice

Blessing

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Call to worship

God of all grace, we are here to worship you,
Not because you need our worship,
But because we need to express our love for you this day,
In prayer and song and words and silence,
In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.¹

Hymn:

595 STF – Lord, we have come at your own invitation OR
20 STF – Be still for the presence of the Lord

Opening Prayers

In this space
Between the week behind us and the week to come
It's a good time to reflect...

We bring you the past week, and take stock of everything we experienced
The challenges, the joys, the moments of mundanity, and the things we have learned
We bring you the moments from this week of which we're not so proud:
The hurtful words we've said, and the uplifting ones we've left unsaid
We bring you our carelessness, our short temper, our selfishness
We ask your forgiveness and renewal.

[Silence]

In this space
Between the week behind us and the week to come
It's a good time to look ahead...

We place this coming week into your hands, and ask for your strength
For every challenge or tough decision that comes our way, we ask for your courage
For every opportunity that comes our way, we ask that you will strengthen us to use
the gifts you have given us
With everyone we meet and share this week with, we ask for your help to be the
hands, feet and voice of Jesus.

[Silence]

In this space
Between the week behind us and the week to come
It's a good time to acknowledge...

We are never alone,
Every step of this journey, you walk alongside us
Our companion, our friend, our guide.

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

Even when it's difficult to feel your presence with us, you are there,
Rejoicing with us, weeping with us, guiding us along the path,
May we find all the courage we need from this sure knowledge.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

(Prep – A small bush with red, yellow and orange tissue paper attached to it, or the best approximation of a burning bush you can make!)

To help tell the story today I need a few volunteers who are good at listening to instructions and herding sheep!

(Collect a few volunteers)

Friends, before you is a man called Moses and a group of people travelling with him. Moses had had a strange few years up to this point! He lived in a palace, had all the fine things in life, then discovered he was adopted, ran away, was taken in by people who lived in the desert and off the land and now...he herds sheep.

(Encourage the people with Moses to herd the congregation like sheep. Congregation can bleat if they wish!)

While out herding the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, far in the wilderness he came across a bush!

(Bush appears)

But this was no ordinary bush! It wasn't a blueberry bush, nor one of Lavender; it was a normal bush...but it was on fire, and yet not burning! Moses had so many thoughts going through his head! *(Have the people with Moses read out these lines, one a piece)*

- What's going on here?
- I can't believe this!
- Amazing!
- Why doesn't the bush burn up?

Suddenly, Moses' train of thought was interrupted:

(God, somewhere with a microphone) "Moses! Moses!"

Moses, at once, said "Yes! That's me! Hi!"

(God, somewhere with a microphone) "I am the God of your Father; The God of Abraham; The God of Isaac, The God of Jacob! Don't come closer! Remove your sandals from your feet! You're standing on holy ground!"

² Opening prayers written by Emma Dobson

(Have the Moses and the people with him remove their shoes)

Moses was obedient and did remove his shoes. They hide their face from God, both afraid of looking at God and in reverence for God. After all, this is a holy place. Moses was about to ask why God was talking to him, when God answered:

(God, somewhere with a microphone) “I’ve taken a good, long look at the affliction of my people in Egypt. I’ve heard their cries for deliverance from their slave masters; I know all about their pain. And now I have come down to help them, pry them loose from the grip of Egypt, get them out of that country and bring them to a good land with wide-open spaces, a land lush with milk and honey, the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite.

The Israelite cry for help has come to me, and I’ve seen for myself how cruelly they’re being treated by the Egyptians. It’s time for you to go back: I’m sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the People of Israel, out of Egypt.”

This was a lot for Moses to take in! God wants me! ME! To free the Israelites?!

(Have the people with Moses look confused and concerned)

But God knows what is on our hearts and minds; it is the same now as it was then. Knowing Moses, God put him at ease, that he wouldn’t be doing this alone:

(God, somewhere with a microphone) “I’ll be with you. You’ll never be alone and I’ll be the proof that I sent you.”

With that, Moses grabbed his shoes, gathered his flock, and went back to his father-in-law and with his people they made their way to Egypt to shepherd God’s people to freedom.

(Thank Moses and those with him for their help)

God saw something in Moses that not even Moses could see, and guided Moses to go onto free the captured Israelites from Egypt and lead them. And Moses wasn’t alone because God was with him. The same thing counts for us: God has a plan for us, and sees the amazing person that we are going to be, more so than we are now! And we don’t have to go it alone, because God is with us always.

Almighty God, help us to be attentive and as obedient as Moses, be with us as we go about our days, and guide us to being the awesome human that you want us to be.

Amen.³

Hymn:

87 STF – Praise to the Living God! OR

51 STF – Great is thy faithfulness

Readings: Exodus 3:1-15; Romans 12:9-21; Matthew 16:21-28

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Annan-Hood

Hymn:

158 STF – Lord, you sometimes speak in wonders OR

272 STF – From heaven you came, helpless babe

Reflections on the readings

I wonder how many of you can recall a time when a Children's Bible was just a standard edition of the King James' (Authorised) Version *with* pictures? A picture of Moses' encounter with the bush often formed one of the illustrations. Any seven-year old receiving that Bible (as a Sunday School prize) might struggle to read the language of the seventeenth century but s/he could study the pictures. However, there was a 'brownness' about the depiction of this story: at the focal point of the picture, in the middle ground, was the bush, which didn't look very impressive, (it was just a piece of scrub). In the foreground was the elderly figure of Moses, cowering behind his arm, looking towards the viewer whilst avoiding looking at the bush. The whole scene seemed to be occurring in the midst of a sandstorm.

As children looking at that picture, what would we have thought? Would we have regarded Moses as a heroic figure? Would we have realised that we were being invited to 'see' a pivotal moment in the story of the relationship between God and His people? It all looked so depressingly 'brown' and ordinary. Maybe this was not a case of a picture being worth a thousand words, instead we may need a thousand words to make that dreary picture come alive!

Introducing our 'hero'—Moses:

Moses doesn't look much like a hero. He's long grown from the cute baby in the bulrushes, the endangered Hebrew boy who was found and saved by an Egyptian princess. Though he was raised in a palace, like an Egyptian princeling, as he grew to manhood he knew himself to be an alien among the Egyptians: he was not one of them. Ethnically, he was a Hebrew, but his tribe rejected him. When he beat and killed an Egyptian slave master who was beating a Hebrew slave, Moses was forced to leave Egypt and go on the run. So he crossed the Red Sea to the land of Midian, where he married Zipporah, the daughter of a Midianite priest named Jethro. Despite him having lived amongst them for forty years, the Midianites, however, still saw Moses as a foreigner!

Moses was a murderer, a refugee, an alien and a foreigner, someone with a colourful past but no clear future direction. At this point in his life, reduced to tending his father-in-law's flock, you might describe him as one of life's failures: a loser, a zero.

How an encounter with a bush can change your life and that of a nation:

Hence, at the beginning of Exodus 3 Moses is looking for pasture for Jethro's flock and has drawn near to Mount Horeb (Sinai), the mountain of God. This was an area that was sometimes regarded as being sacred, holy ground (it was believed that you could draw closer to God in High Places).

As he is working, Moses notices that a nearby bush appears to be on fire, but it is not being consumed, so he ventures closer in order to investigate this curious phenomenon. The bush reveals and hides. As Moses approaches, God calls to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And Moses says, "Here I am."

Did you notice how the biblical author narrated this part of the story, as if bushes commonly speak and elderly shepherds readily converse with them? Certainly, Moses seems to recognise, instinctively, that it is God who is addressing him. In obedience,

Moses removes his shoes, because he is on holy ground and in the presence of the Almighty.

The voice reveals that the speaker is the God of Moses' forebears (which of course raises the question as to whether Moses, raised as an Egyptian and for 40 years married to the daughter of a priest of Midian, has been faithful to this God?). Moses dares not look at God for fear that he will be struck down, but he listens to what God has to say.

God is compassionate: He says He has seen the plight of his people and is coming to their rescue. He promises them freedom from the Egyptian oppression and a rich land in which to settle (albeit a rather overcrowded one judging from the number of tribes already resident there!).

So, God challenges Moses to be His agent, "Now go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

Can Moses make the transition from zero to hero? Not unlike others in the Bible who are called, (e.g. Jeremiah and Jonah), Moses is resistant, "Who am I?" he asks. He's a reluctant hero, (and wouldn't you be, too, if you were an 80 year-old exile with a price on your head?).

God assures Moses that he will provide him with the skills and the means to rescue the people. When the task is complete, Moses will serve God at Horeb (that holy place where he is now standing).

The God with a name

Moses needs a sign, he says that the people are sure to ask the name of this God who says that He is the God of their forebears. So God reveals His name as "I AM." It's a 'name' derived from the verb 'to be.' In the Hebrew this is the tetragrammaton (the 4-letter name of God that is transliterated as YHWH) which is too holy to be spoken, Jews encountering it within a text would not have dared to articulate it but would have said, instead, "Adonai" (Lord). (Many of our English language translation Bibles follow this convention.) In the context of this dialogue with Moses, is **the Lord** saying, "I am who I am," or, as some translators would recommend, "I will be who I will be?"

He is God of the forebears (the past); the God who IS (God of the present); and the God who will be (God of the future).

The God of Moses' forebears does not actually need a personal 'name,' because He, simply, IS, for all generations. The Lord is not an idol, He is immanent (in-dwelling throughout creation).

This God is calling Moses....

What can we learn from this passage?

As is often the case in the Bible, when God decides to choose someone to serve Him, He doesn't choose the obvious leader but one who could only succeed by God's power, rather than his own. Moses is not your typical Jewish hero: he's an elderly man whose life-story would suggest that he has lost his way, he's a murderer, an exile, a man who has married a foreign woman. He doesn't look to be the future greatest prophet and lawmaker of his people.

Yet, somehow, in the course of his dreary daily life, at God's instigation, Moses encounters Him near God's Holy Mountain and the rest, as they say, will become (Salvation) History.

So, in the course of your daily life, look around you, find your 'bush,' approach God's holy place with awe: listen. Is God calling you to serve Him, to carry out a task in His name? Remember, the God who calls will provide. Old Age?: not an excuse. Inability: God will grant the skills.

For all of us are called as Christ's disciples to go out and proclaim the God who was, is and is to come...

To God be the glory.⁴

Hymn:

615 STF – Let love be real, in giving and receiving OR

674 STF – Would I have answered when you called, 'Come follow, follow me!'

Prayers of intercession

Yahweh (Lord) God,
God who was and is and is to come,
In the ordinariness of everyday life, help us to listen for your voice and seek your will and your way.

Lord hear us: **Lord graciously hear us.**

Creator God: Make us good stewards who are respectful of the earth.

We pray for those who are being affected by 'global boiling,'
People whose homes and livelihoods have been destroyed by fires in Canada and Greece.

Those whose underlying health conditions cause them to struggle to cope during heatwaves.

Lord hear us: **Lord graciously hear us.**

Compassionate God: we pray for those whose plight you have recognised.

We pray for all refugees and asylum seekers,
For those who risk their lives in flimsy boats, and for those who rescue them.
Make our land a place of refuge, safety and welcome.

Lord hear us: **Lord graciously hear us.**

God of the Future: we pray for those who anticipate new beginnings,
Teaching staff who are taking up new posts,
Pupils who will start at new schools this term,
Those beginning their University studies.

Grant them the desire to learn and grow in knowledge, even as they grow closer to you.

Lord hear us: **Lord graciously hear us.**

Loving God: we hold before you any known to us who are suffering, those who are sick in body or in mind. We pray for health and wholeness,

We pray for the dying and stand alongside all who mourn, asking that they may be comforted...

⁴ Reflection written by Wendy Kilworth-Mason

Lord hear us: **Lord graciously hear us.**

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

This is the day that the Lord has made,
These are the gifts that the Lord has given us,
Today is our opportunity to respond to God's grace
And seek peace in the world, in Jesus' name

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

504 STF – May the mind of Christ my Saviour OR
274 STF – Jesus Christ, I think upon your sacrifice

Blessing

We have come into your presence, and heard something of your word,
We have turned aside from our lives and noticed the divine.

As we step out of this space,
Help us to see that you go before us,
That you are a fast God, always ahead of us, always inviting us on.

We step out, in your name, Lord God,

Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Wendy Kilworth-Mason

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker