

twelvebaskets



ORDINARY 23A

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

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Ordinary 23 - Year A
10th September 2023



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

36 STF – There's a quiet understanding OR

28 STF – Jesus calls us here to meet him

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

183 STF – Praise to the God who clears the way OR

19 STF – Be still and know that I am God

Readings: Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 149; Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 18:15-20

Hymn:

49 STF – God beyond all names OR

476 STF – One more step along the world I go

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

254 STF – Seek ye first the kingdom of God OR

654 STF – The love of God comes close

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

665 STF – Make us your prophets, Lord OR

712 STF – Put peace into each other's hands

Blessing

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Call to worship

Let us gather in this space,
Let us turn aside from the world out there,
Let us recognise that God is here, in our midst.

Come amongst us, Lord Jesus

Amen.¹

Hymn:

36 STF – There's a quiet understanding OR

28 STF – Jesus calls us here to meet him

Opening Prayers

Loving God,

As we meet together in your presence - either in a common building or a virtual space
- we take a moment to reflect on your many, many gifts.

The gifts we are constantly aware of, and those we take so easily for granted.

For the gift of this new day and the opportunities it brings, we give you thanks and
praise,

For our family and our friends, who bring such joy and colour to our lives, we give you
thanks and praise,

For the gift of your creation, this world over which you gave us the challenge and the
privilege of stewardship, we give you thanks and praise.

We ask your forgiveness for the times we have squandered your gifts,

For the time we have wasted on living in fear, indecision and close-mindedness,

For the relationships we have taken for granted, and put under strain with selfishness
and harsh words,

For the carelessness we have shown as stewards of your creation.

Lord, it often feels undeserved, but your grace transforms us,

You offer us your forgiveness and your renewal,

May we move forwards in your love, striving to be your people of light,

In Jesus' name

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

What does Eastenders, The Avengers, Bluey and the Church all have in common?

(Encourage and ask for answers from the Congregation)

A lot of the problems that these groups face is down to someone hurting another person, be it physically or emotionally. Captain America and Iron Man had a falling out so bad that it leads to the movie Civil War and took five movies for them to make up! Bluey and Bingo occasionally upset one another but apologise in the end.

Eastenders...well there are a lot of people who upset each other and sometimes take years to apologise and make up.

Sometimes we hurt people by accident, and that causes a lot of pain. It doesn't always end up in a large fight in a German Airport, but the pain is very real.

But! There are ways to try and heal that hurt. And it comes down to two things: humility and good communication. Jesus even gave us a plan of how to heal some hurts between those we are friends with:

(Read Matthew 18: 15-17, of which the Message Version is below, but please use a version that you are comfortable with)

"If a fellow believer hurts you, go and tell him—work it out between the two of you. If he listens, you've made a friend. If he won't listen, take one or two others along so that the presence of witnesses will keep things honest, and try again. If he still won't listen, tell the church. If he won't listen to the church, you'll have to start over from scratch, confront him with the need for repentance, and offer again God's forgiving love."

Step One: Work things out.

Step Two: If step one doesn't work, bring someone along to help the conversation.

Step Three: If steps one and two don't work, go to your church community for help.

Step Four: If nothing above works, start again; but keep at it.

These steps might be difficult or challenging for us. Confronting someone who has caused us pain, or approaching someone we have hurt takes a lot of courage, but Jesus again tells us that we're not alone in this; but God is with us!

(Read Matthew 18: 18-20, of which the Message Version is below, but please use a version that you are comfortable with)

"Take this most seriously: A yes on earth is yes in heaven; a no on earth is no in heaven. What you say to one another is eternal. I mean this. When two of you get together on anything at all on earth and make a prayer of it, my Father in heaven goes into action. And when two or three of you are together because of me, you can be sure that I'll be there."

Whenever we are having these conversations: God is with us and wants to help us mend the hurt. Repairing the hurt might take a long time; but God is there helping!

Before we go, let us all pray, but take a moment of quiet to think of those people who have hurt us or those we have hurt that God might be nudging us to work things out with.

(Moment of pause, then prayer)

Loving God, you know our hearts and can hear the names of the people we are thinking about. Help us have the confidence and courage to be good communicators and work to mend hurts in our relationships and help us to ask for help in mending these relationships.

Amen.³

Hymn:

183 STF – Praise to the God who clears the way OR

19 STF – Be still and know that I am God

Readings: Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 149; Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 18:15-20

Hymn:

49 STF – God beyond all names OR

476 STF – One more step along the world I go

Reflections on the readings

I'd like you to pause for a moment, and imagine your own personal community. Who are the people you have around you in life, who are part of your community? They might not live anywhere near you, or you might share a house with them...

Often, to help with an exercise like this, it's helpful to visual a series of concentric circles, with the smallest one representing your immediate community, very closest friends, people you see or speak to most days. Who is in this closest circle for you? *[Pause to allow people to think of who that might be for them].*

Then another, slightly larger circle representing good friends, extended family members, closest colleagues, people you see or speak to often, but probably not every day. Or people you don't get to see that often, but who when you do see them it's immediately 'like the old days'. Who are you thinking of?

[Pause to allow people to think of who that might be for them].

Then, beyond that, another couple of circles – the first with occasional friends and acquaintances, the sorts of people you only see once or twice a year, or don't have a particularly deep and meaningful relationship with.

[Pause to allow people to think of who that might be for them].

Our community is important, and that is part of the reason the church exists today – as a place where we can learn more about God, worship, pray, practice our faith in action – but not do so in isolation. As the founder of the Methodist movement John Wesley,

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Annan-Hood

once said: 'there is no holiness but social holiness'. We can't learn more about what it means to follow Jesus without the connection with other human beings.

Do you agree with Mr Wesley? Do you think it's possible to do discipleship on your own, or outside of the context of community? Spend a minute reflecting on this, and then share your thoughts with your neighbour.

So, firstly, a moment of quiet to think... *[Pause for a minute]*.

And now, turn to the person sitting next to you, and share your responses – what do you think – is there a holiness without social holiness?

[Give people 3 or 4 minutes to talk in their groups, then bring them back together].

Today's readings are littered with examples of and invitations into community. We are helped to see how Wesley came to that conclusion, and how the early church formed into community groups across the world. One of the things that historians of Wesley agree on is that he was an excellent 'organiser'. He may even have been a better organiser than he was a theologian – because ultimately this becomes the skill that leads to the birth of the Methodist movement and it's existence 285 years after he had his heart

'strangely warmed'... Getting people together, building community, providing people with discipleship buddies, friends and spaces where we can support each other.

In Matthew 18, we read:

"Truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

That is the essence of Christian community – when we gather, we are able to recognise the Christ present in each other, to support each other, to worship, learn and grow together.

In the Old Testament reading, from Exodus we have heard that classic tale of the beginning of the exodus from which the book gets its name – the moment when the Israelites escape the clutches of slavery and oppression in Egypt. Throughout the whole of the Old Testament, and even today, this story remains vital for the Jewish people. It is their foundation story, the narrative that binds them together, that shows how they are God's chosen people, how – as a community – they are testament to God's love.

We need these kind of narratives, don't we? To help us find our place, to help us recognise who we are. Do you have a story like this? A story that places you in your community, that helps you make sense of who you are in the world? Maybe, after the service today, you might like to share those stories with each other and with me. For example – why are you worshipping in this church? Why do you live in this part of the country? Why do you commit to a particular political party, football team, or similar?

[Pause].

Then we come to the Romans reading which is an invitation to think about love. Paul, in his letter, refers to the relationship between the law – which is a set of rules that might help us to guide our lives – and love, which changes our every core. Laws are

important and helpful, but Paul recognises that Jesus' life and ministry changes the way we think about human relationships.

This summer has featured one of the best Test cricket series in recent times, in the Men's Ashes, between England and Australia. It has been close, hard-fought, and finished 2-2. But, it has also raised some important questions about the 'spirit of cricket'. There was a particularly significant moment when the English wicket-keeper, Jonny Bairstow, was run out by the Australian keeper, Alex Carey, when he'd walked down the pitch to talk to his teammate. Within the laws of the game, it was definitely out and the umpires had no choice but to give it out...but it raised the question about whether it was within the 'spirit' of the laws. There were other instances too, of touch-and-go decisions that were pretty clear in terms of the 'letter of the law' but less clear in terms of the 'spirit of cricket'. You may have heard the phrase 'it's just not cricket'... well, there was plenty of that, on both sides!

I tell that story only to help us recognise that there are times when 'laws' don't seem to cover it. It doesn't matter how good the legislation is, there are loopholes and gaps in the wording that don't seem to capture the 'spirit' of the law. That's how large companies manage to avoid paying tax, it's why people spend a fortune on lawyers to escape mistakes they have made, it's why Jonny Bairstow felt very aggrieved about his dismissal in the Ashes!

But, you can't argue with love. Love doesn't have terms and conditions or legal outworking. Love is the fulfilment of the law, as Paul puts it – because why would we harm one another when there is love.

That is what it means to live in community, to build relationships, to work for social holiness: that we have a bunch of rules and contracts to define our relationships, but that we allow love to be the principle of how we act.

All We Can, the Methodist international development agency, has three values, of which the most important one is 'love'. In the charity's strategy documents is this wonderful little phrase: 'love is the oxygen of our movement'. Is that true for us, in our church, in our community, in our closest circles?

Spend a few minutes talking in small groups about these two questions:

1. What would it mean for 'love to be the oxygen of our movement' here?
2. How could you practice 'love' instead of law or rules in your life and the institutions you are a part of?

[Give people a few minutes to talk, and invite a few people to share their responses].

Community is the beating heart of what it means to be human, of what it means to follow Jesus, and what it means to learn to love and to be loved in return. Let us build a community here, in this space, where others can come and taste that love.

Come amongst us, Lord Jesus, and show us how to be people of love.⁴

⁴ Reflection written by Tim Baker

Hymn:

254 STF – Seek ye first the kingdom of God OR

654 STF – The love of God comes close

Prayers of intercession

Gracious God,

Our world is broken.

There is so much injustice, so much that is wrong with our world.

Come, Lord, with your refiner's fire, and cleanse all that is wrong, all that is evil, from this world.

We look out into a society, and a country torn apart by the impact of Coronavirus and the way it has affected so many of us differently. As we wait for the dawn, for the end of this time of darkness, we see great injustice at play in the way the virus has affected those already vulnerable.

We see isolation and mental health crises.

We see joblessness and livelihoods destroyed.

We see racial injustice highlighted and white supremacy emboldened.

Come, Lord, with your refiner's fire, and cleanse all that is wrong, all that is evil, from this world.

We look out into a world where so much is still wrong – so much is not as we wish it was. As we look out onto that world, Holy God, show us a road to healing.

We see poverty, and many people going to bed hungry tonight.

We see climate change, continuing to affect the most vulnerable, continuing to destroy livelihoods around the world.

We see structures and systems built to allow the rich to get richer and the poor, poorer.

Come, Lord, with your refiner's fire, and cleanse all that is wrong, all that is evil, from this world...

And let it begin with me.

Living God, show me what is mine to do.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

Thank you, Lord, for all we have received.

Thank you for the many things we can count as blessings, including the ones we often take for granted.

Help us to use what we have, including the gifts of our offering today, to build your Kingdom, to spread your good news, here on earth.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

665 STF – Make us your prophets, Lord OR

712 STF – Put peace into each other's hands

Blessing

Let us be people of the gospel, Lord,

People who bring good news into our homes, our families, our communities, our whole world.

Show us how to join in with what you are doing, O God.

Amen.⁷

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker