

# twelvebaskets



## ORDINARY 24A

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

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**Ordinary 24 - Year A**  
17th September 2023



## **Order of Service**

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

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

**24 STF – Come, now is the time to worship**

Opening Prayers

The Lord’s Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**499 STF – Great God, your love has called us here OR**

**167 STF – Colours of day dawn into the mind**

Readings: Exodus 14:19-31; Romans 14:1-12; Matthew 18:21-35

**Hymn:**

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

**408 STF – How small a spark has lit a living fire!**

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**393 STF – She sits like a bird, brooding on the waters OR**

**693 STF – Beauty for brokenness**

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

**683 STF – Great is our redeeming Lord OR**

**503 STF – Love divine, all loves excelling**

Blessing

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## Call to worship

God of all grace,  
We have come to learn something of your desire for our lives,  
This day, this week, and in the days and weeks to come.

Come amongst us, by your Spirit, O God,

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## Hymn:

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

24 STF – Come, now is the time to worship

## Opening Prayers

Lord of unlimited forgiveness, of the seemingly undeserved second chance,  
Your grace astounds us,  
At the centre of everything that doesn't seem to make sense, we find you,  
With arms outstretched,  
Ready to welcome us home,  
More than willing to take us exactly as we are.

So we come...

We come with our failings, our fears and our regrets.  
We come with our joys, our hopes and our good news.

We come with all our complexity, the different hats we wear, our many facets, knowing  
we do not have to explain ourselves or make excuses in your presence.

We come to offer you our humble sacrifice of praise, knowing you receive it with joy.

We come...

We come, seeking your forgiveness for the things done and left undone, the things  
said and left unsaid.

*[Silence]*

We come, seeking your strength and courage to face the coming week, with all the  
joys and challenges it holds.

*[Silence]*

We come, ready to hear your word anew, and ask that you will open our ears, eyes  
and hearts to receive your call and your challenge.

In Jesus' name we pray,

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 have a question I want to ask...but it might be a little controversial. Is it okay that I ask you all and get an answer?

Who here thinks pineapple belongs on pizza?

*(Go around the congregation and get some responses, both for and against pineapple on pizza. Encourage folks to share their views, and get competing views)*

Even in here the eternal debate of pineapple on pizza is a little divisive! We've heard some people are very firm on their views, while others are a little more open to the idea. And yet we are all here in community! It's something that sadly we've lost in the wider world; the ability to be able to sit and disagree in love.

The key part of that is being in good relationships with not only each other, but with God as well. In fact, Roman's had a great way of describing how to live together in healthy way:

*(Read Romans 14: 1-9, of which the Message Version is below, but please use a version that you are comfortable with)*

*"Welcome with open arms fellow believers who don't see things the way you do. And don't jump all over them every time they do or say something you don't agree with—even when it seems that they are strong on opinions but weak in the faith department. Remember, they have their own history to deal with. Treat them gently.*

*<sup>2-4</sup> For instance, a person who has been around for a while might well be convinced that he can eat anything on the table, while another, with a different background, might assume he should only be a vegetarian and eat accordingly. But since both are guests at Christ's table, wouldn't it be terribly rude if they fell to criticising what the other ate or didn't eat? God, after all, invited them both to the table. Do you have any business crossing people off the guest list or interfering with God's welcome? If there are corrections to be made or manners to be learned, God can handle that without your help.*

*<sup>5</sup> Or, say, one person thinks that some days should be set aside as holy and another thinks that each day is pretty much like any other. There are good reasons either way. So, each person is free to follow the convictions of conscience.*

*<sup>6-9</sup> What's important in all this is that if you keep a holy day, keep it for God's sake; if you eat meat, eat it to the glory of God and thank God for prime rib; if you're a vegetarian, eat vegetables to the glory of God and thank God for broccoli. None of us are permitted to insist on our own way in these matters. It's God we are answerable to—all the way from life to death and everything in between—not each other. That's why Jesus lived and died and then lived again: so that he could be our Master across the entire range of life and death, and free us from the petty tyrannies of each other."*

However. What if we lived in this way, but hurt one another? What if our disagreements were so bad that it causes deep physical and emotional hurts. Well... the simple answer is forgiveness. We speak a lot about forgiveness in our prayers,

and we sometimes say a lot of words when the single word “Sorry” is what we need to say.

Jesus gave a simple answer to Paul:

*(Read Matthew 18: 21-22, of which the Message Version is below, but please use a version that you are comfortable with)*

*"At that point Peter got up the nerve to ask, 'Master, how many times do I forgive a brother or sister who hurts me? Seven?'*

*Jesus replied, 'Seven! Hardly. Try seventy times seven.' "*

Now 70 times 7 is an awfully large number. In fact it's 490. But Jesus wasn't saying that you only forgive someone 490 times, and on 491<sup>st</sup> time they don't get forgiven. Rather, Jesus was saying that we should still forgive them. We should keep forgiving them because that's what God does.

Let us pray.

Loving and Welcoming God, help us to see the people around us the way you see them, to love them the way you love, and to forgive us the times we don't love people in a way that is glorifying you.

Amen.<sup>3</sup>

### **Hymn:**

499 STF – Great God, your love has called us here OR

167 STF – Colours of day dawn into the mind

**Readings:** Exodus 14:19-31; Romans 14:1-12; Matthew 18:21-35

### **Hymn:**

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

408 STF – How small a spark has lit a living fire!

### **Reflections on the readings**

Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788) is remembered as one of Britain's most well known hymn writers. He penned thousands of hymns, songs and poems during his lifetime, many of which are still remembered and sung all over the world.

Charles Wesley's 'Top Ten' includes *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*, *O, For a Thousand Tongues to Sing* and one of the best known Christmas carols – *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing*.

One of his most popular hymns – and one particularly beloved by members of the Methodist Church – is *And Can It Be*.

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<sup>3</sup> All Age Talk written by Tim Annan-Hood

\*Take a moment to reflect on the first verse. Read it out loud together. What phrases jump out for you?

*“And can it be, that I should gain,  
an interest in the Saviour’s blood?  
Died he for me, who caused his pain?  
For me, who him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! How can it be  
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?”*

In these opening words, Charles Wesley tries to express his deep and heartfelt feelings about having a living relationship with God, made real to him through a knowledge and acceptance of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

He writes in questions, almost disbelieving that he could be in this situation. I can imagine him sitting at his writing desk, pondering, and in simple terms, saying out loud “Who – me? You died for – me?”

The result of this reflection is an outpouring of praise throughout the hymn, as Wesley tries to explain his understanding of what Jesus has done for him.

In Methodist services, the part of the hymn sung with the most gusto is the end of verse four:

*“My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.”*

As you reflect on these words, I wonder what they could mean for you, and for our world today? Talk with your neighbour about how you feel they may or may not be relevant.

This is followed by an assurance by Wesley that “*no condemnation now I dread*” because “*Jesus, and all in him, is mine!*” The hymn ends on a positive note as he claims his faith and knowledge of forgiveness.

I really wish the servant whose debts were cancelled in our Gospel reading today could have shared Charles Wesley’s reaction. He is in a very difficult situation but is freed from it by his boss. He really must have felt as if ‘his chains fell off!’

However, this does not translate into the way the servant treats others. Even after experiencing deep grace and forgiveness of his substantial financial obligations, the servant reacts by violently demanding a much smaller payback from his fellow worker. There is a disconnect between how he is treated and the way that he then goes on to treat others.

Peter’s original question to Jesus, which provokes the telling of his parable, is about forgiveness but there is another word used in this passage which is important, and that is mercy.

Mercy is defined by the Merriam-Webster online dictionary as showing compassion, especially to one who you have power over. Mercy may also be seen as an act of divine favour or compassion shown by God.

You might like to spend a little while thinking about the differences and similarities between forgiveness and mercy. Are they the same?

But back to Peter’s question and Jesus’ response. Jesus tells Peter quite sternly in the end that forgiveness is non-negotiable in Christian life. It is not always easy but it is necessary.

Or, as theologian Tom Wright puts it: *“If you’re still counting how many times you’ve forgiven someone, you’re not really forgiving them at all, but simply postponing revenge.*

*‘Seventy times seven’ is a typical bit of Jesus’ teaching. What he means, of course, is ‘don’t even think about counting; just do it.’*

An idea for further action: Find out about the work of the Forgiveness Project, an organisation which shares modern stories of forgiveness in order to promote hope, empathy and understanding.

Why not have a look at their website: [www.theforgivenessproject.com](http://www.theforgivenessproject.com).<sup>4</sup>

### **Hymn:**

393 STF – She sits like a bird, brooding on the waters OR

693 STF – Beauty for brokenness

### **Prayers of intercession**

To quote John Wesley, founder of Methodism:

“Let your good spirit watch over us, O Lord, your love every rule in our heart and your mercy and forgiveness ever keep us in body, mind and soul”.

Let us pray, with that quote in mind.

God of forgiveness and mercy, sometimes you must look at us and despair. You call us to forgive, but we hold grudges; you call us to have mercy, but we seek revenge. This is true not just for us as individuals, but for communities, governments and countries.

We pray for a different way of living which models your way of forgiveness and love.

Teach us your ways, O God

**Show us your paths.**

God of forgiveness and mercy, we pray today for families who experience disagreement and division. We pray for those whose outstretched hands or gestures of peace are rejected. We pray for those who are hanging on to bitterness and anger. We pray for reconciliation, forgiveness and new starts for those people who long to be reconnected with those they love. We pray for a different way of living which models your way of forgiveness and love.

Teach us your ways, O God

**Show us your paths.**

God of forgiveness and mercy, we pray today for churches where disagreement is rife; where congregations deeply disagree, where words and actions are designed to hurt and divide. We pray for Jesus’ words of forgiveness to be accepted and absorbed – for ways forward to be found through prayer, honesty and the leading of the Holy Spirit. We pray for the leaders of your Church, God – that they may exercise wisdom,

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<sup>4</sup> Reflection written by Mandy Briggs

humility and compassion. We pray for a different way of living which models your way of forgiveness and love.

Teach us your ways, O God

**Show us your paths.**

God of forgiveness and mercy, begin a new work in our world. Change the hearts of leaders who seem to be wedded to violence and unrest instead of striving for peace. Speak deeply to advisors and influencers, that they may be voices for peace instead of backing schemes which cause more bloodshed and unrest. In this time of extreme climate change, we pray for actions and decision to be made which will alleviate suffering and pave the way for a more hopeful future. We pray for a different way of living which models your way of forgiveness and love.

Teach us your ways, O God

**Show us your paths.**

We keep silence as we remember people and situations which we carry in our hearts:

Teach us your ways, O God

**Show us your paths.**

These paths of forgiveness are not easy God, yet we are called to walk them.

We pray for the strength to do so, while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, who goes before us and shows us the way of love.

In the name of Jesus

Amen.<sup>5</sup>

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

Gracious God,  
I offer you all that I have, and am.  
And in this moment, we offer you our gifts,  
Use them, and use us, to build your Kingdom,  
In Jesus' name,

Amen.<sup>6</sup>

**Hymn:**

683 STF – Great is our redeeming Lord OR  
503 STF – Love divine, all loves excelling

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<sup>5</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Mandy Briggs

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



## **Blessing**

As we go from this place,  
May we go with the fire of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.  
May we go out to see a world where your justice burns, brighter than ever.  
May we be agents of peace, grace and love,  
In the name of the Creator, the Christ and the Spirit,  
Amen.<sup>7</sup>

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