

# twelvebaskets



## ORDINARY 26A

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

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**Ordinary 26 - Year A**  
1st October 2023



## **Order of Service**

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**401 STF – Come, sinners, to the gospel feast OR**

**377 STF – Down the mountain the river flows**

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**455 STF – All my hope on God is founded OR**

**362 STF – Meekness and majesty, manhood and deity**

Readings: Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16; Philippians 2:1-13; Matthew 21:23-32

**Hymn:**

**247 STF – I danced in the morning when the world was begun OR**

**465 STF – Guide me, O thou great Jehovah**

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**518 STF – Father, hear the prayer we offer OR**

**434 STF – Rock of Ages, cleft for me**

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

**459 STF – Captain of Israel's host, and Guide OR**

**345 STF – And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood?**

Blessing

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## **Call to worship**

Here in this place, the Lord of all is made known to us.  
Now, at this time, the Spirit of the divine is amongst us.  
Today, as we worship, Christ come to worship with us.

Show us how to worship you in Spirit and Truth, we pray, Lord God,  
Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## **Hymn:**

401 STF – Come, sinners, to the gospel feast OR  
377 STF – Down the mountain the river flows

## **Opening Prayers**

Let us pray, a prayer of thanksgiving.

Gracious and loving God,

We come before you with hearts full of gratitude and thanksgiving. We thank you for the gift of Jesus, who humbled himself for our sake, becoming obedient even unto death on a cross.

We thank you for the love and grace poured out upon us through Jesus, a love that knows no bounds and a grace that transforms our lives.

We are thankful for the fellowship of believers, the comfort of your Spirit, and the countless blessings you bestow upon us each day. Thank you for the gift of life, for family and friends, for the beauty of creation, and for the hope that springs eternal in our hearts.

In the Spirit of unity, and humility we join together and recognize all the good things you have given to us. May our gratitude be evident in our lives.

Amen

And now, a prayer of confession.

As we reflect on the example of Jesus in Philippians 2, we are reminded of our shortcomings and failures. We confess that at times we have not humbled ourselves as we should. We have been selfish, seeking our own interests rather than the interests of others. We have let pride and ego guide our actions instead of the humility and love demonstrated by Christ.

Forgive us, O Lord, for the times when we have fallen short of your glory. We ask for your forgiveness for our sins of commission and omission, for the times when we have not lived up to the call of discipleship. Help us to turn away from our sinful ways and turn toward you, seeking your guidance and grace.

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

In your mercy, cleanse us from all unrighteousness, and renew a right spirit within us. May we, like Christ, become obedient servants, willing to lay down our lives for the sake of others.

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

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

### **All Age Talk**

Today, we're going to explore a parable from the book of Matthew 21:23-32. In this story, Jesus tells us about two sons.

Let me paint the scene for you now. Jesus is in Jerusalem, and the religious leaders come up to him with a question. They ask, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" You see, they were curious about Jesus' teachings and actions.

In typical Jesus fashion, rather than answering the question in the way we might expect, Jesus begins to tell a parable (a story to me and you). He says, "A man had two sons. He went to the first son and said, 'Go and work in the vineyard today.'" The first son initially says, "I will not go," but later he changes his mind and goes to work in the vineyard.

Then the man goes to his second son and tells him the same thing. This second son, however, replies immediately, "I will go, sir," but he doesn't actually go and work in the vineyard.

However, the question is: which of the two sons did the will of his father?

What do you think they answered? (*Wait for people to answer from the congregation if appropriate.*)

That's right! They said, "The first." Even though the first son initially said no, he changed his mind and did what his father asked.

You see, Jesus told a parable to demonstrate that the Pharisees were doing a lot of *talking*, but not much real *doing*. Jesus was making a point that the Pharisees were caught up in saying they did the right thing, but they were missing the big picture. They were missing Jesus!

Being obedient, or in other words following Jesus' example, is just one way we can have a relationship with God and make a positive impact to those around us. Why not give it a try for yourself?

Amen.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by Matthew Forsyth

<sup>3</sup> All Age Talk written by Matthew Forsyth

**Hymn:**

455 STF – All my hope on God is founded OR

362 STF – Meekness and majesty, manhood and deity

**Readings:** Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16; Philippians 2:1-13; Matthew 21:23-32

**Hymn:**

247 STF – I danced in the morning when the world was begun OR

465 STF – Guide me, O thou great Jehovah

**Reflections on the readings**

*"But... we've always done it that way."*

I want to start with an apparently true story, although the source is unknown...

*A quality management consultant was visiting a small and somewhat antiquated English manufacturing company, to advise on improving general operating efficiency. The advisor was reviewing a particular daily report which dealt with aspects of productivity, absentee rates, machine failure, down-time, etc. The report was completed manually onto a photocopied pro-forma that was several generations away from the original master-copy, so its headings and descriptions were quite difficult to understand. The photocopied forms were particularly fuzzy at the top-right corner, where a small box had a heading that was unreadable. The advisor was interested to note that the figure '0' had been written in the box on every daily report for the past year. On questioning the members of staff who completed the report, they told him that they always put a zero in that box, and when he asked them why they looked at each other blankly. "Hmmm.., I'm not sure about that," they each said, "I guess we've just always done it that way."*

*Intrigued, the consultant visited the archives to see if he could find a clearer form, to discover what was originally being reported and whether it actually held any significance. When he found the old reports, he saw that the zero return had continued uninterrupted for as far back as the records extended – at least the past thirty years – but none of the forms was any clearer than those presently in use. A little frustrated, he packed away the old papers and turned to leave the room, but something caught his eye. In another box he noticed a folder, promisingly titled 'master forms'.*

*Sure enough inside it he found the original daily report pro-forma master-copy, in pristine condition. In the top right corner was the mysterious box, with the heading clearly shown .... 'Number of Air Raids Today'.*

So, today's quiz question and memory challenge is... have a think back to your time in the church, as a congregant, maybe time spent in meetings, or discussions over coffee after the service... or even in parts of your life that have nothing to do with church... Can you think of times when people have used the phrase "we've always done it that way"?

*[Feel free to invite discussion here if appropriate to your setting.]*

The next question may be a little more challenging...

Can you think of a time when YOU have used the expression?!

*[Again, invite discussion here if appropriate, although this one may be better as a rhetorical question!]*

I remember a discussion at my home church years ago when someone dared to ask the question: “why do we stand when the offering is brought forward?” No-one could answer it.

The tradition that had developed from further back than anyone could remember is that when the offering had been collected during the service, the music started playing and then everyone in the congregation would stand as it was brought forward to the front and the offering prayer would then be duly delivered, and everyone would sit down. I know this does happen in a number of churches, but certainly not all of them.

All of this of course took place unannounced. There was simply a baseline assumption that everyone would know what to do. This was the reason the discussion took place as we pondered how warm our welcome was as a church. We had noticed that when anyone new actually dared to turn up to worship for the first time, they hit moments like that in the service (there were others too) where they had no idea what to do and were simply expected to know, presumably by some kind of thought transference?! It all contributed to something which made people feel uncomfortable, which was not the definition of a warm welcome. They may well have been specifically and individually “welcomed” by a couple of keen folks – and by that I mean welcomed to within an inch of their lives! – all resulting in them never coming back and everyone lamenting the fact no-one came to church anymore... I wonder if this discussion is familiar with you?

This is just an example of the fact that there is peril in the phrase “we’ve always done it that way”...

Incidentally, after chewing it over, we decided that standing for the offering was a physical expression of us offering ourselves to God and the mission to which we are called. We all quite liked that and stood with just a little more enthusiasm from then on! Thankfully also, this resulted in some significant changes in the church to make the welcome much more authentic and relaxed.

Jesus tackles this issue head on in today’s gospel reading. In one of his simpler and most straight forward parables he draws a clear distinction between the decision to have the integrity to change your mind and the policy to say you will do something then simply not bother. Inherent in the “right” path is the decision to admit you were wrong in your first assumption and this is often the part people have the most problem with. Jesus is clear about which is right.

I enjoy the stories about Jesus’ tussles with the Pharisees and the people who were basically threatened by him and his followers. Here he ties them up in knots by asking a question where whichever answer they might give will have them in trouble. But after the clear and simple example about the difference between the man’s two sons – at which point maybe they sensed a little bit of confidence coming back – he then ranks them below tax collector and prostitute in the social pecking order – a statement guaranteed to not only annoy them but also to get most attention from anyone who may be in earshot. It would be like someone today on social media suggesting that an unemployed person and a migrant would be more deserving than others because of their choices in life... you can just imagine the storm that would follow... but there is a serious point here...

Jesus is suggesting the tax collectors and prostitutes are in a better place because they have looked at their behaviour and been brave enough not only to challenge it, but also to have the courage to change.

The courage to change...

The comparison is to the Pharisees who clearly demonstrate their dogged desire to stick to their traditions and rules and woe betide anyone who might want to think or behave differently. It's their way or the highway...

So how might this message speak to us today?

Do you sense a situation in your life where you may need the "courage to change"?

- Personally?
- At church?
- At work?
- With close friends and family?
- With the way you choose to spend your time?

*[You may wish to use these questions to have a conversation in groups or as a whole congregation, or leave them for people to reflect on].*

The other Lectionary readings today offer further illumination on these choices, and Paul provides us with a couple of angles to support this principle and challenge from his letter to the Philippians.

The first is a verse which stood out to me because of the radical challenge it offers.

*2:3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.*

"Better than yourselves"...?

We regularly hear stories about the battle for human rights across the world, where the goal is a search for freedom and equality.

Equality.

OK, equality is good, we're happy with that – it's got to be a good thing that everyone is perceived as equal to each other – and there are indeed plenty of societal situations where this is patently not the case and change is required, demanded and rightly campaigned for.

However, Paul takes this principle to a new place for us today.

This isn't equality. This goes beyond equality. This is a place where we would need to humble ourselves to place everyone else's needs in a higher place than our own.

Wow.

The needs of the tax collector and the prostitute are MORE important than mine?

The needs of the unemployed person and the migrant are more important than mine?

The gospel is an upside-down view of the world where equality is indeed perhaps the end goal, yet we are told here we might achieve it by each individual placing others needs higher than their own... i.e. starting from an odd place of IN-equality...

I recently read a book that has the potential to change the world. It's that good. It's simply called "The Book of Joy" and it's the record of a week-long conversation between two spiritual giants – Archbishop Desmond Tutu and The Dalai Lama. It was a meeting that very nearly didn't happen because of ill health and circumstances but in 2015 these two incredible people shared their thoughts and ideas about life and faith and joy and where the secret to joy may lie.

And they told us.

The place where joy is to be found is in the place where we look out from ourselves and consider the needs and desires of the other people around us ahead of our own. Their explanation is of course much deeper than this and I'd recommend reading the book. They were both – inspired greatly from their life experiences and spiritual traditions – so utterly convicted on this point. The Dalai Lama in particular consistently talked about seeing himself as “just another human being” amongst seven and a half billion others on very many occasions during the conversation, and is so completely convinced that this is the way society should function... and it's hard to argue against.

The second angle Paul brings to the debate is an assurance that we are not alone in our quest to bring these changes about

*2:13 for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

We feel the influence of the Holy Spirit in many ways – through our own spirituality, through the support of those around us – through our challenges and experiences... and Paul assures us here that we do not face our challenges alone. We are all part of a beautiful Communion through the Spirit and are connected in a way that means we need never be alone in facing the world.

It can be tricky to know, grasp and feel exactly what “God is with you” actually means, and it will of course mean different things to different people. For today let your thoughts and feelings be what they are, and at least allow yourself to feel a sense of Paul's conviction...

So, what is the lesson of today as we look out into the world and consider our choices:

1. It is good to be brave enough to change your mind when required
2. It is good to do it when you sense other people may benefit from that change
3. It is good to know and accept that God is with you as you move forward

In a further twist to the Lectionary tale today... Ezekiel chapter 18 is a typically rambling Old Testament passage that talks about a range of typically Old Testament themes like sins of the fathers, genealogy, responsibility, hereditary blame, hell fire, damnation, and of course... sour grapes! (Apologies to anyone who may be offended by such a glib summary!)

I guess there's two ways of tackling it – maybe we should organise a four-week bible study to pick it apart and get the debate going about exactly what God was trying to say.... or perhaps we put the confusing passage down to experience and take away the gem of a phrase right at the end of the chapter which I feel is so very appropriate for our message today. I'm not saying the study wouldn't be worth it, but at least for today I'm proposing option two.

So here goes... our takeaway for today summed up in merely four words from the end of this reading.

Think on this as you ponder your life and circumstances and wonder if maybe it's time to make some changes...

*“Turn, then... and live!”<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> Reflection written by Kevin Dobson



**Hymn:**

518 STF – Father, hear the prayer we offer OR

434 STF – Rock of Ages, cleft for me

**Prayers of Intercession**

***Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***

There are so many people who experience feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness, for a complicated set of reasons.

Do you know anyone who feels like this right now? - Can you reach out?

Do you feel like this right now? - Can you be open to others reaching out?

Jesus brought a gospel message to turn the world upside down, and he told us that those who feel unworthy are blessed. Help us to help them feel a true sense of worth.

Help us Lord Jesus, to change our minds for good.

***Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land.***

The world has many people who exist under the radar. Passive, unassuming, and serene, and sometimes they are eclipsed by the bold and unyielding.

Do you know anyone who feels like this right now? - Can you reach out?

Do you feel like this right now? - Can you be open to others reaching out?

Jesus brought a gospel message to turn the world upside down, and he told us that those who feel insignificant are blessed. Help us to help them feel brave.

Help us Lord Jesus, to change our minds for good.

***Blessed are they who mourn: for they shall be comforted.***

Every day someone's loved ones are lost. Those left behind are facing a changed life, an emptiness and a myriad of emotions threatening to tear them apart.

Do you know anyone who feels like this right now? - Can you reach out?

Do you feel like this right now? - Can you be open to others reaching out?

Jesus brought a gospel message to turn the world upside down, and he told us that those who mourn are blessed. Help us to help them feel and nurture a glimmer of hope.

Help us Lord Jesus, to change our minds for good.

***Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill.***

***Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***

***Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.***

The world can be an unfair place. Across the globe we see injustice time and time again in our own lives and in the world's news headlines.

Can you think of an injustice that is burning you? - Can you reach out?

Jesus brought a gospel message to turn the world upside down, and he told us that those who burn for justice and peace are blessed. Help us to help bring peace into these places.

Help us Lord Jesus, to change our minds for good.

***Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.***

From random acts of kindness to organised charitable endeavours, there are so many examples of giving and helping going on around us.

Can you think of a favourite charity and the work they do?

Can you think of a kind and gracious person that you know who gives selflessly?

Can you reach out to help?

You may already be helping in this way. If so – well done!

Jesus brought a gospel message to turn the world upside down, and he told us that those who feel compassionate are blessed. Help us to help that compassion to spread.

Help us Lord Jesus, to change our minds for good.

Amen.<sup>5</sup>

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

God of all grace,

Lord of all this land,

Saviour of our hearts and minds and souls,

Come amongst us now, O God, in this place.

Come and use these gifts, given today and the gifts that live within each one of us,

Use them for the building of a different kind of world,

One full of grace and truth,

By your Spirit,

Amen.<sup>6</sup>

**Hymn:**

459 STF – Captain of Israel's host, and Guide OR

345 STF – And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood?

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<sup>5</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Kevin Dobson

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

## **Blessing**

Go forward with a heart renewed by grace, and may the Holy Spirit empower you to live a life that reflects the love of Christ to the world.

Amen.<sup>7</sup>

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