

twelvebaskets



ORDINARY 27A

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

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Ordinary 27 - Year A
8th October 2023



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

101 STF – Before the world began OR

3 STF – Eternal God, your love's tremendous glory

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

504 STF – May the mind of Christ my Saviour OR

255 STF – The Kingdom of God is justice and joy

Readings: Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20; Psalm 19; Philippians 3:4b-14;

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

107 STF – I sing the almighty power of God OR

156 STF – From the breaking of the dawn

Reading: Matthew 21:33-46

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

293 STF – All heaven declares OR

278 STF – O love divine, what have you done!

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

353 STF – Jesus is Lord! Creation's voice proclaims it OR

545 STF – Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart

Blessing

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Call to worship

We have come, come amongst us Lord Jesus.

We have gathered in your name, come amongst us by your Spirit.

We are here to worship, show us how to follow in your ways.

In Jesus name we pray,

Amen.¹

Hymn:

101 STF – Before the world began OR

3 STF – Eternal God, your love's tremendous glory

Opening Prayers

We pray a prayer of thanksgiving, based on today's Psalm, Psalm 19.

[You may wish to ask the congregation if anyone can share what thank you is in their mother tongue, or how they normally say thank you – e.g. cheers, ta, etc, then ask them to shout this aloud at the end of the prayer.]

Let us pray.

We come before you with hearts overflowing with thanksgiving, for the heavens declare your glory, and the skies proclaim the work of your hands. Your creation, from the vastness of the universe to the tiniest details of our lives, reveals your wisdom, power, and love.

We thank you for the gift of life and the beauty that surrounds us—the sun that warms us, the moon and stars that light our nights, the mountains, rivers, and seas that display your majesty. We thank you that through creation you remind us of your steadfast love and protection.

Above all, for your steadfast love and grace extended to us through Jesus Christ. In Jesus, we find forgiveness, redemption, and the promise of eternal life. For this we all say: thank you!

Amen.

Let us pray a prayer of confession.

Creator God, we are sorry for when we have not stewarded your world in a way that promotes the flourishing of all creation.

We ask for forgiveness for those shortcomings and ask that you might help us turn back to you. We ask that we would feel a sense of connection to creation that stirs within us a deep care and concern for that which is in trouble.

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

Forgive us for the times when our selfishness has led us to think of ourselves ahead of others. We humbly ask that you would grant us your mercy and peace.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

In today's story, Jesus tells us about a vineyard. Do you know what a vineyard is? (wait for a response).

It's like a big garden where people grow grapes to make yummy grape juice and wine.

Coincidentally does anyone also know many days it takes for a grape to dry enough to become a yummy raisin?

Answer- 3-4 days! As a grape has to lose at least 80% of its water content for it to be classed as a raisin.

Now, in the story here was a man who owned a vineyard. He worked really hard to make it a beautiful and fruitful place. He planted grapevines, built a fence around it to keep animals out, and even built a watchtower to protect it. He did everything he could to take care of the vineyard. But the owner had to go away for a while, so he hired some workers to take care of the vineyard while he was gone. These workers were supposed to make sure the grapevines grew healthy and strong. Now, here's where the story gets interesting. When the grapes were ripe and ready to be picked, the owner sent some of his servants to collect the grapes. But do you know what happened? The workers didn't want to give the grapes to the owner! They were being very mean and didn't listen to the servants.

So, the owner tried again. He sent even more servants, thinking they would listen, but the workers were still very mean to them. They didn't want to share the grapes with the owner at all. Finally, the owner had an idea. He thought, "Maybe they will respect my son." So, he sent his own son to the vineyard, thinking the workers would listen to him. But guess what? The workers didn't respect the son either. They were so mean that they even hurt the son and sent him away.

Now, let's talk about what this story means. The vineyard owner represents God, and the vineyard is like the world God created. We are the workers in the vineyard. God gives us this beautiful world to take care of, and God wants us to share all the good things in it, like love, kindness, and helping others.

But sometimes, just like the workers in the story, we forget that everything we have belongs to God. We might be mean or not share with others. God is like the loving owner who wants us to do the right thing and take care of His world.

² Opening prayers written by Matthew Forsyth

So here are some tips that you might want to try:

- Turn off the light when you leave the room.
- Make sure you recycle as many of your food packaging items that you can.
- Look for the sell by date on your food and make sure you use it.
- Try to reduce your shower time to save water.
- Why not plant a tree if you can.

These are just some ideas but you might want to talk to your neighbour now and choose another idea.

[After the conversation, bring people back together, invite them to write down or make a note of what they are committing to, as you sing the next hymn.]³

Hymn:

504 STF – May the mind of Christ my Saviour OR

255 STF – The Kingdom of God is justice and joy

Readings: Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20; Psalm 19; Philippians 3:4b-14;

Hymn:

107 STF – I sing the almighty power of God OR

156 STF – From the breaking of the dawn

Reflections on the readings

A reflection on today's Psalm.

What images give you strength and hope in your faith? I find a God of love and joy, something both warm and challenging. I want to share with others that slight skip in my heart. Yet the reading today from Exodus is of a very different God. One with rules and regulations. Specific ones that have resonated down the ages and led to world-changing results.

Last year, Europe tumbled back into conflict the moment Russian tanks crossed the border into Ukraine. Recent history was turned on its head, and the 'bad old days' of the Cold War seemed to soon be defrosted and waved about as what the future held.

Men around Ukraine and Russia soon found that they were being called up to fight in the conflict. That call had legal status (conscriptio) and was a way for the politicians to enable either their action into Ukraine or the expulsion of Russian forces from Ukraine to happen.

As nation fought nation, and many other countries (ours included) sent billions of \$ worth of military aid (e.g. weapons), a painful truth was soon discovered. A long-fought right was about to be discarded.

³ All Age Talk written by Matthew Forsyth

The right to be a conscientious objector is hinted at within the UN Charter of Human Rights, where the freedom of conscience is reflected. This right is a universal, global right and only exists because people in the UK risked prison to stand up for what they believed in.

In 1914, over a hundred years ago, men went to prison in the UK because they didn't want to be called up to fight. Instead, as transcripts of their diaries and statements showed, they felt that by killing another human, they were killing someone who was made in the image of God. Indeed, it is striking how many transcripts show that the 'thou shalt not kill' commandment had a natural deep resonance. If the bible said it, they would say, then I can only follow what I am asked to do.

At first, this dissent was loosely tolerated but had no legal standing. Finally, in 1916, when conscription was introduced into the UK, the right to refuse to fight due to conscience was granted. This only came about because between 1914-1916 hundreds of men refused to fight and stood up to the authorities and the state who suggested they should fight. They suffered great hardship. Sometimes a lifetime of suffering as a result. Over time, once granted, this right spread throughout the world and, while easy to follow in peacetime, it's protection is essential in wartime.

Anyone, at any time, may find their conscience pricked by what they are either about to do or have done. We all discover, in our everyday lives, that at moments, we step beyond what we think is allowed and then have to find a way to make amends.

For some people, it is simple. Their faith says they shall not kill; therefore, they will not. Yet this right is being denied to people in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. Instead, it is only because of global networks like the Fellowship of Reconciliation (a Christian peace, justice and nonviolence movement part of a global interfaith movement) that international advocacy for this right continues.

But we miss a key element of this passage if we think of it and its application on us as individuals and in isolation. Instead, we think about what we are hearing. We are hearing dispatches from people on the move. Fleeing slavery, they seek new life under the laws of God.

And so what we are hearing is a reminder of the basic principles under which a society should function. In a society, no one should kill someone else. This is not just a nice dream, shared in times of peace and forgotten in times of war. Instead, it's something that we are all called to live out and find our own way within.

Of course, most of us will never face the horrific moment when our nation is invaded, and we need to decide whether we pick up a weapon against a fellow human being. However, we are all caught up in broader cycles of dehumanisation through the presence of violence within the world. The most frequent presence is small acts of oppression and violence within our words and our actions, even in the church. From nasty gossip to disregarding someone's perspective because it doesn't match ours. All are acts of dehumanisation and violence.

That's why our prayers of confession earlier in the service are so important. They are a chance to recognise within ourselves actions and words that have hurt others rather than build the Kingdom.

But I don't want to finish on that downbeat note. Instead, we move now towards hope. Hope is found in new beginnings. But also hope is found in the community. The passage today tells not of individuals wrestling with their conscience but of a whole community being directed on how to live.

Movements like the Methodist Peace Fellowship (www.mpf.org.uk) have provided a nurturing and growing space for generations of peacemakers. Each has had their own struggles and their own failings. Yet, by entering into a community that travels together towards their goal of a world based on peace, they find strength, hope and support.

Look around you today at the church. Who here has supported you? Who has helped in ways, big or small, in your faith journey? As John Wesley reminds us, we do not follow a solitary faith. We follow one created and lived out in the community.

And that is why I think the anger of God, as explored within the Psalm, is more one of frustration and desperation than one of bolts of lightening from the sky. It's an anger of frustration as God knows all we are capable of and despairs because we fail to use our gifts to build up the Kingdom. However, the presence of this Holy Rage is tempered by the knowledge we are not to follow a faith by ourselves but to explore it with others. Others who will support us in our failings and encourage us when we do well. Others who hold a mirror up to each of us to challenge us about how we live our lives.

So, in the coming days and weeks ahead, take time to consider your own words and actions. How they can build up or strike down others? But don't be afraid; instead, consider a God of love who calls you into community. A community who will support you as you try and build the Kingdom here, knowing the best glimpse of the Kingdom is yet to come.

Reading: Matthew 21:33-46

Reflection on the reading

It's a strange feeling, isn't it, managing something you didn't think was possible? I'm sure we've all had moments where we have discovered we can do something we previously didn't know we could. From working out how to navigate the menus of various streaming platforms on the television to fixing part of the car, the scale of achievement isn't the issue – instead, it's the fact that we have managed something we didn't think we could!

God is a God of many things. Surprises is one of them! Throughout the Gospel stories, we are constantly surprised by the people Christ helps and the stories he shares. Prostitutes. Tax Collectors. The injured and the diseased. All are welcomed into the arms of Christ. All were rejected by the society they lived in. However, we shouldn't think the upside-down nature of God means anything goes. Following the passage read last week, today's gospel reading is a passage of encouragement and challenge.

Who has influenced you on your journey of faith? Occasionally it might be a minister or teacher. More likely, if we sat down with most of you and chatted, we'd find it was someone different. Maybe the person who knew when to pick up the phone or offer you a meal to heat up at home. Or it was someone who offered to pray when all else seemed futile. It was, in short, people who put their energy into living out the teachings of Christ.

This small, local measure is something that is reflected around the world, from issues significant to issues small. The local people often have the correct answer to complex and demanding situations.

The country of Sudan has been caught up in conflict many times. When conflict broke out earlier this year, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a Christian peace, justice and nonviolence movement, sent a message of peace and solidarity to its partner branch in Sudan.

After a few weeks, the FoR then had a fascinating dispatch from its partner in the world's newest country, South Sudan. In it Light, their colleague who runs the South Sudan FoR branch explained how civil society had leapt into action when conflict broke out.

Civil society is a clunky phrase, but its meaning is simple. It's not the government. It's not business. It's people like you and me who just get on and do things! Contacts in South Sudan and Sudan communicated to share stories of safety and security. Then, people in the south mobilised to pressure all sides to start talking. Soon, a broader network sprung up called "Because of our Country," which aimed (alongside the advocacy work) to provide humanitarian help to people fleeing south from Sudan.

This network sprung up because they recognised that larger organisations would take time to respond, and time wasn't on their side. Instead, like the parable of the loaves and fishes, people would use the resources they had at the moment to respond – knowing that longer-term help would come in later days.

The people in the network knew about the principles of peace and nonviolence. But it was only when put into the situation that they discovered what they were truly capable of. This transformative nature is at the heart of the FoR International Peacemakers Fund (www.for.org.uk/ipf). If I took you through many stories, you would soon find a similar example. Ordinary people caught up in extraordinary conflict or post-conflict situations. They turn from everyday people into agents of transformation because they were trained in skills they could share with others.

Today's Gospel reading encourages us all to find power within. It's a fairly rough story. A vineyard is established with all the resources and tools required to harvest and benefit from a rich crop. Unfortunately, the people who work in the vineyard take short-term moves - including acts of violence - to make short-term financial gains instead of using their skills to bring in the harvest.

Why does Jesus tell this parable? Because he is warning the religious leaders and rule-setters that the people who live out the spirit of his message will discover the Kingdom of God. Those who don't will have it removed from them.

The Kingdom of God is a beautiful and wonderful place. We hear snippets of it littered in images and stories throughout the bible. What is clear is that peace, justice and equality will flourish and all will find a home. That vision is transformative because we are also reminded that the kingdom of God can be found here on earth.

So we are challenged to decide, over the next week, will you use your skills, gifts and talents to further build the kingdom of God? Because if you do, you will discover new talents within yourself and further enrich the lives of others.⁴

Hymn:

293 STF – All heaven declares OR

278 STF – O love divine, what have you done!

Prayers of intercession

We look inward:

Gracious Lord,

⁴ Reflection written by John Cooper

We bring our whole selves before you now and offer you all that we have. We name silently the struggles we may be facing, the fears that we carry, the burdens we cannot shake off, and ask that you help us. Give us your strength and guidance. We thank you for walking with us throughout each moment of our lives and ask that you help us to draw closer to you; that we may be renewed, and our spirits refreshed, uplifted, and unburdened, ready to share the good news of a life lived with you.

Hear the cry of your people,

Answer us, O Lord.

We look around:

Prince of Peace,

We pray for our local and wider communities. We ask Lord for your presence within this area. Help us to shine where there is darkness, help us to bring hope and joy, bless the relationships and friendships at work and use us to be beacons in this place. We pray for our local leaders within our church and beyond. We ask that you protect and lead them, helping them to be wise, compassionate, and filled with integrity as they work for the benefit of our communities. We pray for the schools and education centres and ask that they will be safe spaces for children and young people to grow and become the people you have ordained them to be.

Hear the cry of your people,

Answer us, O Lord.

We look further afield:

God of all creation,

We pray for the places where there is conflict [*an opportunity to name specific countries and regions where there are wars and unrest*] and ask for your intervention and reconciliation. We pray for peace to abound, for nations to be humbled and able to work together, for families to be reunited, fighting to cease, and for the pain of conflict to be healed. We pray for the world leaders and especially our own government. We ask that you will be a lamp to their feet as they navigate the uncertainty of this time. We pray for the millions of people, especially women and children, living in poverty and struggling. We pray Lord that you will help us all to play our part in looking after our brothers and sisters. We pray for unity across nations in tackling the climate crisis and the injustice it brings. We thank you that you are a God of love and abundance and pray for a renewal in our world of generosity and care.

Hear the cry of your people,

Answer us, O Lord.

We look up:

Almighty God,

We lift our hearts and eyes to you and offer you all the prayers that we have spoken out loud and silently. May you gather them all and reassure us that no word, thought or deed is missed by you. We give thanks that in you all things are possible.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Sheila Matthews

Thank you Lord, for this planet you created, which we get to live in.
Thank you, for all the many blessings we have received.
Help us to be generous with what we have been given, to share, to remember that
everything is gift, to use what we have for your grace,

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

353 STF – Jesus is Lord! Creation's voice proclaims it OR

545 STF – Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart

Blessing

May we leave guided by God's ever present care and love
May we go forward in the assurance of God's faithfulness and forgiveness,
In the beauty and peace,
In the creation God has called us to care for

Amen.⁷

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker