

twelvebaskets



ORDINARY 29A

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

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Ordinary 29 - Year A
22nd October 2023



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

83 STF – Praise, my soul, the King of heaven OR

455 STF – All my hope on God is founded

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

496 STF – God beyond our dreams, you have stirred in us a memory OR

564 STF – O thou who camest from above

Readings: Exodus 33:12-23; Psalm 99; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; Matthew 22:15-22

Hymn:

519 STF – Father, I place into your hands OR

331 STF – King of kings, majesty

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

701 STF – Heaven shall not wait OR

711 STF – Pray for the Church, afflicted and oppressed

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

662 STF – Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred? OR

713 STF – Show me how to stand for justice

Blessing

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Call to worship

Let us worship together in the Spirit,
Let us sing and pray and learn and listen and grow,
Together.

Because there is no holiness but social holiness,
And together we can encounter something of you in each other, O God.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

83 STF – Praise, my soul, the King of heaven OR

455 STF – All my hope on God is founded

Opening Prayers

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise.

The Lord is mighty and loves justice,
We praise and give thanks for his compassion and grace.

The Lord is holy,
we come humbly before his altar and bow down.

The Lord listens to the call of his people
and answers them with comfort, strength, and kindness.

The Lord is here,
his Spirit dwells among us,
his love is never ending.

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Are you a 'grumbling' sort of person?

In the story we are going to hear later in our service, we have another exchange between the Pharisees and religious leaders and Jesus. These people were constantly getting at Jesus, and often doing lots of grumbling! They didn't like his ministry and the way he was challenging and changing things – and tried to catch him out as often as they could.

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Sheila Matthews

Perhaps we know how they feel?

Who here – show me by waving your hands – who here gets a bit scared and grumpy when things start to change?

Yes, thought so! Some people genuinely love change, but most of us find it difficult, and can push back against it.

In the story, Jesus keeps changing the narrative and helps re-frame the way we think about money, our gifts, and our giving, but his teaching only comes after much grumbling...

And, as we've already established, grumbling isn't all bad, but maybe there is a warning for us in this story for how we go about it. When does grumbling tip over into something else? Something more harmful, hurtful and destructive? Something like gossip, or criticism, or shaming?

Let's be careful, when we grumble, or we gossip, or we whinge, not to do harm to others.

And, in particular, when we are tempted to join in with a gossip and a grumble, can we listen out for God's plan? For God's 'bigger story'? For the way God is calling us to change, grow and re-think the way we have always done things.

Often, as human beings, it can be easy to become obsessed with ourselves and our own needs. When we do that, we often miss the opportunity to help someone else, to share God's love, to be generous for a moment. We think inwards, instead of looking outwards.

I'm not saying 'don't grumble', but this week, as the opportunities to grumble and whinge present themselves, may we also find ways to support others, to build them up, to see hope at work. As the psychologist and motivational speaker Brene Brown would put it, 'to contribute more than we criticise'.³

Hymn:

496 STF – God beyond our dreams, you have stirred in us a memory OR

564 STF – O thou who camest from above

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Hymn:

519 STF – Father, I place into your hands OR

331 STF – King of kings, majesty

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Baker

Reflections on the readings

If you've ever spent time on long car journeys with friends and families, you may well have found yourself distracted from the tedium of the journey by passing cars brandishing their own personalised number plates.

Selling sometimes for thousands of pounds, it is often amusing to see how people have structured together a selection of letters and numbers to spell out a name or a word special to them. Examples include P3 TER, to spell Peter. Or R4 LPH for Ralph. Sometimes rather than a name, a combination has been concocted to spell out something rather more cheeky; indeed there are certain combinations banned by the DVLA for being altogether too rude.

But whatever it spells, the reason people do it seems simple: It's a way of personalising the car in a way that is unique to the owner. It identifies the car as their property, or perhaps as an extension of their character or personality.

We often like to mark out our ownership of our things. Sometimes it may be purely functional, so that an item can be returned should it be mislaid. Anyone who has laboriously created and sewed name labels into school uniforms will attest to that.

Other times marking our ownership of things may be our way of expressing ourselves to those around us: how we decorate our home or the gifts we give to others. Or perhaps it's our way of staking our claim in the world: creating something that will outlive us and provide something for others to remember us by.

How do the things you own and the things you do present yourself to others?

Does it matter to you how you may be seen and understood by those around you?

[Spend a couple of minutes discussing these two questions as a congregation, or in small groups].

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus identifies how Caesar quite literally stamped his image into the trading coins of the day. And there's nothing unusual about this: coins and stamps from all over the world have always borne the likeness or identifications of rulers and heads of state. And, purposefully or not, they act as a reminder that the worldly items we own never truly belong to us; we all live under a worldly authority in some form or another.

However, Jesus' radical teaching at the time often suggested that perhaps Caesar wasn't the ultimate authority in people's lives; that perhaps there was a greater authority under which we all live and are ultimately all answerable to.

For those around Jesus, this was dangerous talk. To question Caesar was to buy yourself a one-way ticket to jail. By mentioning Caesar's image on coins, no doubt those who were challenging Jesus and attempting to goad him into saying something treasonous thought they'd come up with a clever ruse: something that would force Jesus to say that Caesar may not be the highest authority in the land.

However, Jesus neatly side-steps the issue and points out that whilst the currency and the laws of the land may well come under the authority of Caesar, outside the accumulation and concentration on worldly things, there is a far wider authority under God. The items that bears Caesar's image can, and indeed should be given to Caesar. But everything that bears God's image? Well that belongs to God.

Which begs the question: What bears God's image? How can we identify what, of all we experience in the world around us, is being led and managed by God? It is the same question being posed by the people of Israel in our first reading. As they follow Moses in their journey through the wilderness, life is hard. It is too easy for them to

imagine that God isn't really in charge or that Moses doesn't really know what he's doing. Moses was constantly being harangued by the people of Israel: demanding to know why things were happening the way they were. Wanting to know what was going to happen next.

And so, Moses' plea that God make it clear to everyone that it was God who was leading the journey seems like a perfectly reasonable request. Moses wanted people to see that God was in control of the situation. He wanted to remind everyone that God was the ultimate authority they were following. Perhaps, not too dissimilar to placing an image of one's self on every coin in the land as a reminder of who was in charge.

But the response Moses gets demonstrates that this is not the way God works.

Rather than plastering his image on everything and everyone, God conversely refuses to let his face be seen. 'No one may see me and live' is the response. You might think this is a rather curt response. It may come across as something of a threat, even a rather vicious one. It brings to mind the secretive manipulator who refuses to reveal their identity; the sinister James Bond villain only seen in silhouette; sat in a big chair stroking a cat in an evil fashion. But perhaps that is to misunderstand the point. Perhaps it is less about wanting to be understood as an anonymous dictator and more to do with recognising that God works in a quite different way to earthly leaders. To live a truly peace-filled life, our strength comes not from a worldly image; a token of ownership or authority, but rather a recognition that we reside in a whole universe created by a God who cares and loves us.

A God who longs for a personal two-way relationship with his people, not a dictatorial reminder of who's the boss. A God who sent his son into the world to demonstrate his love for us. A God who we choose to worship, serve and follow rather than a trophy to be fawned over.

Some of the first words of the Bible state that we are all made in the image of God.

If we want to know what God looks like, then the answer is already all around us. Already staring us in the face in plain sight. In every person we meet: every friend, neighbour and colleague. And that means it can also be seen by others in us: in the things we say or do, the decisions we make, the priorities we live our lives by.

With all of that in mind, perhaps we, too, can stamp an image into the world around us. But not just an image of ourselves; but an image of God, our creator. An image of Jesus, our redeemer. And in so doing, perhaps we can be living witnesses and a reflection of God's love to all who we meet.

Some questions to ponder:

- Where do you recognise the image of God in your life?
- How might others recognise the image of God in you?
- How might you lead people to Jesus by the choices you make?⁴

Hymn:

701 STF – Heaven shall not wait OR

711 STF – Pray for the Church, afflicted and oppressed

⁴ Reflection written by Lewis Cox

Prayers of intercession

Loving God. We remember that we are all, each and every person, made in the image of God. However, in a world so full of greed, violence and selfishness, it can be so hard to see your likeness in creation.

Lord, where we see suffering, injustice and unfairness, we pray that your grace and mercy may be a beacon of truth. That those with the power to positively change other people's lives will hear your message of grace and mercy.

Where we recognise power and authority being wielded with an iron fist, forced onto communities and groups while simultaneously rights and freedoms are stripped away, we pray that your strong message of fairness and love for our neighbour may break beyond the boundaries and walls that we ourselves have built.

For those who suffer in silence, aching with the pain of loneliness, anxiety or self-doubt, may they feel your presence with them, guiding their life and accompanying their journey.

For those whose lives are full of sorrow and pain; those who are ill or dying, those who mourn the loss of loved ones; those who fear what the future may bring; may they see your image reflected in those around them, and may your love through others bring comfort, peace and hope.

And we take time to recall the situations known to us, where we pray that your image of grace and mercy may be reflected.

[Pause]

Loving God, we bring our prayers to you this day remembering that we are all made in your image. And we recognise that you may be calling us to be part of the answers to the prayers we make, so give us the courage and wisdom to step forward in faith, to reflect your image in our own lives, wherever you lead.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Thank you, Lord, for the many gifts you have given us.

Show us, Lord, how to use those gifts for your Kingdom building.

Come amongst us Lord, by your grace, inspire us again today, we pray.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

662 STF – Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred? OR

713 STF – Show me how to stand for justice

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Lewis Cox

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

Blessing

Lord of all hopefulness,
Lord of all joy,
Lord of all we have and are,
Inspire us by your Spirit to be a part of your mission.
Amen.⁷

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker