

twelvebaskets



ORDINARY 30A

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

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Ordinary 30 - Year A
29th October 2023



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

318 STF – Christ, our King before creation OR

169 STF – Come, thou long-expected Jesus

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

46 STF – Everlasting God, the years go by OR

407 STF – Hear the call of the kingdom

Readings: Deuteronomy 34:1-12; 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8; Matthew 22:34-46

Hymn:

132 STF – O God, our help in ages past OR

228 STF – Hail to the Lord's anointed

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

413 STF – Send down the fire of your justice OR

436 STF – What shall I do my God to love, my loving God to praise?

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

402 STF – Go to the world! Go into all the earth OR

547 STF – Beyond these walls of worship

Blessing

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Call to worship

God, we gather here today to worship you, to seek your voice, and to be inspired, encouraged and challenged to go out into the world full of your presence, as your hands and feet.

Come Holy Spirit, and fill us afresh.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

318 STF – Christ, our King before creation OR

169 STF – Come, thou long-expected Jesus

Opening Prayers

From everlasting to everlasting, you are our God,
You are our dwelling place through every season of life.

From the very beginning to the very end, you are sovereign over all,
you are our protector and comforter,
you are the bringer of peace and joy.

O God, as we meet in fellowship,
write your story upon our hearts,
draw your vision on the canvas of our lives,
weave our lives together in harmony and holiness,
that we may be a people who worship you in unity and celebration.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Close your eyes – picture your town / city / country. Picture your house, your school – all your favourite places. Now imagine that Jesus was the Prime Minister and the King. What rules or laws do you think Jesus would have? [*take suggestions – you could prompt them by asking how Jesus' rules might help people who are hungry, poor or sad, or whether Jesus would be more interested in punishment or forgiveness*]

Most of the time we think of rules as being good things. They keep us safe, and they punish people who have done things they shouldn't. But sometimes rules aren't good. Sometimes rules help some people, but they make things worse for other people.

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Sheila Matthews

Do you think if Jesus was in charge, he would want rules that make people happy or sad? Why do you think that? *[take answers]*

Do you think his rules would make people scared or brave? Why do you think that? *[take answers]*

Sometimes we have to argue that a rule is wrong. Even if it makes our life better, we have to say that it's wrong, because it's hurting someone else. Or we might need to suggest a rule that makes someone else's life better, even if it makes it a bit harder for us.

Can you think of any rules or laws you would like to change, because it's not fair to someone else? Are there any rules you would like to create? *[take suggestions – you could prompt them by asking about the environment, or money, or their school, or people on the other side of the world]*

What do you think we could do to help make sure that our rules make people happy and brave, and not sad or scared? What could you do this week?

[Invite people to talk about that with the people they are sitting next to for a few minutes, and then draw people back together to pray this prayer].

God of all grace, thank you for all the wisdom and guidance we receive from you, from the Bible and from people who have studied your word and your ways, who help to shape how we behave and how we treat each other.

Help us to continue to learn from you and be changed by you, so that we can be people of justice, fairness, love and hope in your world today.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.³

Hymn:

46 STF – Everlasting God, the years go by OR

407 STF – Hear the call of the kingdom

Readings: Deuteronomy 34:1-12; 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8; Matthew 22:34-46

Hymn:

132 STF – O God, our help in ages past OR

228 STF – Hail to the Lord's anointed

Reflections on the readings

I am a great lover of poetry, though not so hot on the recall of it. I've always admired those people who can recount whole poems that they love (or had drilled into them at school!) because I wish I could do the same with the poems that I love and remember bits that have brought me great joy.

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Baker

One poem has wriggled around the edges of my mind as I read the lectionary readings for this week. It's a poem I remember hearing, reading and inevitably being asked to write about at school, but I'm sorry to say that after a lot of time trying to find it in the vast poetry anthology of the internet, I've failed to find it. So you'll have to trust me when I say that, somewhere out there, is a beautiful poem about night falling, and the swallows slowly disappearing to be replaced by bats. I remember even now being struck by the imagery of the different winged creatures' behaviours heralding the ending of day and the coming of night- the rhythms of nature reminding us that there is a time for everything, and that each creature has its place.

As we come to the end of the book of Deuteronomy in our Old Testament reading for today, we come also to the end of Moses' life, and to the beginning of Joshua's leadership. We are taught in these verses that Moses was a prophet unparalleled, unequalled for all the remarkable signs and wonders God performed through him, and perhaps we take time to reflect back on the life of this man chosen by God to lead the people into a whole new way of knowing and walking with God. We remember the fact that Moses' very existence beyond infancy was miraculous, that he saw God's face, heard God speaking through fire, and led the people through the Red Sea, away from slavery. I expect that Moses' 'This is Your Life' show would have to be a serialised affair...!

Following the death of this great prophet, so wonderful that none could come close to his signs and wonders and power and words, surely, there was then a great sense of loss, and perhaps a great sense of being lost too, for the Israelite people. Yet the bible tells us that they mourned for the usual amount of time, and then buried his body in an unmarked grave, the location never handed down to others, so he could never be found again.

It doesn't sound much like how we mourn the great leaders of our time now does it? And yet this is so consistent with what the whole of Deuteronomy is gifted to us for. The book of Deuteronomy is not about Moses, it is about God. It is not about how wonderfully Moses led the people, it is about how God is, well, God: faithful, mighty, sovereign, good and righteous. It is a book in which we find Moses talks, but really only God speaks: it is God's words which Moses delivers. So as his life ends, yes it is noted that Moses did amazing things, but he is not venerated exuberantly, there is no great shrine built to honour him, because at all times Moses' task has been to point the people to God. Remarkably, it seems the people have really learned from Moses, and listened to God speaking through him, because it's not that long ago in this particular time line that they were ready to build idols and turn from God in the desert!

For all the wonderful things Moses did, this humble end in an unmarked place reminds us that his task, and our task now, was only ever to point the people to God, and not to gain fame for himself. As his time comes to an end, it is not disaster, just the ending of one moment in time and the passing to another as Joshua steps into role. Not quite the swallows and bats of day and night, but each person playing the part God has created for them, a time for everything, including the death of a great leader, within God's even greater plan.

Of course we might now nod sagely and satisfied thinking to ourselves 'yes, of course, that's just how it should be', but we know too, I think, that actually we're usually altogether more caught up with venerating people or gaining status or reputation for ourselves than we'd like to admit.

The people around Jesus during his earthly ministry, the disciples, Pharisees, Sadducees, priests, passers-by, ever a ragtag bunch who show us a reflection of

ourselves as we gaze into the pool of the past, frequently fell into exactly this kind of folly all too often.

Here in the gospel of Matthew, we've already had plenty of encounters which should surely demonstrate to those around Jesus then, and to us now, that Jesus points us to God, calls us to love God, and indeed is God. Indeed, the author of the gospel of Matthew writes with the intention of proving that Jesus is the Messiah, often drawing on the Old Testament scriptures to demonstrate how Jesus fulfils all that has been said throughout the centuries about who the Messiah will be.

And the writer is not short of encounters with doubters, interrogators, and cynics to continue to build the case for Jesus being the Messiah, and for him pointing always to the divine.

Here, this week, we have Pharisees, who have heard that Jesus has stunned the Sadducees into silence, and they come with further probing questions.

Firstly: which is the most important commandment? (I wonder if Jesus thinks, "ah, an easy one to start us off, this one is very straightforward")

Then Jesus cuts them off and, instead of waiting to see what they might ask next, asks them a question instead. "Whose son is the Messiah?" The Pharisees in turn go for the answer they're sure will win them points: 'David'.

David, another figure in the Old Testament who we hold in high regard. King David who was never perfect but still understood to be a great king and wonderful leader for the people of God. The Messiah would surely be a descendent of David, we know that for sure.

And they're not wrong.

But Jesus takes the opportunity to demonstrate that even the genealogical signposts to the Messiah need to be reconfigured a little in the minds of those who know the scriptures and history of the people of God so well: The Messiah is not the Messiah because he comes as part of David's family, but rather David calls the Messiah, Jesus, 'Lord', acknowledging and honouring that the one who will come in his family line is greater than him, even in his great authority as King and his importance to the people of God.

God chose David for his time, for his season, for all that he could bring to the people of God at the time and in the season gifted to him. But above all else, David, even David, points to God, to Jesus, to Messiah. And the Pharisees are silenced in their turn.

No one dared to ask him any more questions.

We each are invited to make our own choices about how to respond to all we have learned about God, and about God's incarnation in Jesus. Whichever way we choose to respond, we must remember that we are only here for a season, and in time our swallow flight will give way to the beating of bats wings as our day comes to an end. Can we feel certain that, in this life gifted to us, our priority is always to point to God in some way? Are we ready to be beacons, signposts, to our loving, faithful, wonderful God, rather than our own goodness?

You may like to take time by yourself or in a group to consider:

- How does your Christian life point others to God? Are there things you might not be getting right?
- How does the life of the church point others to God? How can we do better?

- What have you read in the news this week that makes you yearn for people to know God better and think less about human achievements?⁴

Hymn:

413 STF – Send down the fire of your justice OR

436 STF – What shall I do my God to love, my loving God to praise?

Prayers of intercession

Loving God,

In your goodness, you have given us Earth to be our home.

We acknowledge that we have thought more about how we can use its resources for our own purposes than about how generous you have been in giving us this creation to sustain us and give us joy.

Teach us how to look after this planet as the precious gift it is.

May our care for the environment show our love of its creator.

In your goodness, you have given us other people to be our siblings.

We acknowledge that we have thought often about how other people might harm or help us, rather than about how we might help others and show your love.

Teach us how to love others as beloved children of our parent God.

May our care for each other show your love for all people.

In your goodness, you have given us the Church.

We acknowledge that we have spent our time, energy and resources in maintaining the Church as we know it for the comfort of tradition.

Teach us how to work together and be true witnesses to your love.

May our worship and service show your greatness and goodness.

In your goodness, you have promised to hear our prayers.

We acknowledge that, too often, our prayers have been for the things we want, and not for the changes we will see if your kingdom is built here and now.

We offer to you in prayer

those who are hungry and thirsty

those who are without a safe place to stay

those who have come to this country seeking safety

those who are unwell, in body, mind or spirit

those who are grieving

those who cannot worship you in freedom without fear of persecution.

Teach us how to seek change and build your kingdom now.

May your kingdom come and all people see who you are,
our loving God.

Amen.⁵

⁴ Reflection written by Becki Stennett

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Becki Stennett

We will now take up the offering.

Lord of all grace, thank you for the many gifts we have received. Bless these, our gifts, our response to your love. May they be put to use for the building of your Kingdom here on earth.

In Jesus' name,
Amen.⁶

Hymn:

402 STF – Go to the world! Go into all the earth OR

547 STF – Beyond these walls of worship

Blessing

Lord Jesus Christ,
Thank you for being a God of justice, love and mercy. We ask that you help us to live after your example, to be models for those around us. Holy Spirit, fill us anew, that we might have the words to speak of your love, and that we would demonstrate that love through our actions.

Amen.⁷

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker