

twelvebaskets



EPIPHANY 5B

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

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Fifth Sunday After Epiphany - Year B
4th February 2024



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

89 STF – Strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord OR

107 STF – I sing the almighty power of God

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

554 STF – In this place, with God's word OR

32 STF – Meet and right it is to sing

Readings: Isaiah 40:21-31; Psalm 147:1-11, 20c; 1 Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39

Hymn:

418 STF – We have a gospel to proclaim OR

657 STF – You give rest to the weary

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

465 STF – Guide me, O thou great Jehovah OR

707 STF – Make me a channel of your peace

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

658 STF – A charge to keep I have OR

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

Blessing

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Call to worship

Jesus calls us, here to meet him,
And we come – from afar or near, connecting together in this act of worship.

We have been richly blessed, and we come to worship the living God, and to be filled again with your Holy Spirit.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

89 STF – Strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord OR

107 STF – I sing the almighty power of God

Opening Prayers

As we come to worship today, we begin together with a call and response prayer. When you hear the words: At this time, in this place, please respond with: We breathe in your love and breathe out our fears.

Breath of life, at this time, in this place,
We breathe in your love and breathe out our fears.

When our to-do lists seem endless and there is always another job that can be done,
At this time, in this place,
We breathe in your love and breathe out our fears.

When family or friendship worries are overwhelming and we don't know which way is up,
At this time, in this place,
We breathe in your love and breathe out our fears.

When we know loneliness more than we care to admit or when we shut others out,
too concerned about what they will think of us,
At this time, in this place,
We breathe in your love and breathe out our fears.

When the week's news headlines break us and we don't know which way to turn to help or
what we can possibly do about it,
At this time, in this place,
We breathe in your love and breathe out our fears.

We take time now to breathe in your love and to breathe out that which we are holding
tightly within ourselves today.

(A moment of silence)

Living light, help us during this time together to feel your life giving breath of hope, of peace,
and of justice within ourselves so that we may be able to go out from this place knowing we

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

are loved and knowing that we sit with all of creation as part of Something Bigger and as one with you. Help us to be guided always by this love.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

On this day in 1913, someone was born that would change the world for the better. I'm going to give you all some clues as to who this person is. When you have an idea who it is, raise your hand and we'll see if your right!

1. They were born in Tuskegee, Alabama.
2. As a child they were often sick with tonsillitis, and often bedridden.
3. They counted Martin Luther King and Malcolm X as friends.
4. What they are perhaps most famous for happened in 1955.
5. There is an act of legislation named after them in the U.S.
6. There is an episode named after and documenting her story in Dr Who.

Any guesses? (Collect guesses from the congregation.)

That person was Rosa Parks. Now, she was born and lived at a time in the U.S. when people who were not white were considered second class citizens. You may have seen photos of restaurants, bathrooms, buses and even water fountains being segregated into "Whites" and "Coloured" areas.

Take a moment to imagine this: every day being told you have less of a right than someone else. That you have to change your day, give up your seat, make accommodations for someone who you have been told "has more rights than you."

Keep that feeling in your mind, and let's look at Rosa's story.

On that December evening, Rosa got on a bus and sat in the coloured area of the bus. As the bus continued down its route, the White's section of the bus filled up. As was the rule at the time, the driver got up and moved the "Coloured Only" sign back, making seats available for the Whites. Rosa was on one of those seats. She was asked to move multiple times by the driver, and on each time said no. Even when threatened with having the police called and being arrested, still she said no.

She was arrested and processed through the system. She wasn't the first to do this, but her act of civil disobedience was like a small stone tumbling that started an avalanche.

Following her example, more people started sit-ins and boycotts of the bus service. Then they started to join the protest marches in Selma, supported efforts to dismantle the "Jim Crow laws" (the laws that enabled this segregation) and, eventually, led to the dismantling of segregation in the U.S.

When asked why she did this, Rosa answered this way:

² Opening prayers written by Hannah Baker

“People always say that I didn't give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn't true. I was not tired physically, or no more tired than I usually was at the end of a working day. I was not old, although some people have an image of me as being old then. I was forty-two. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in.”

Maybe we're like Rosa sometimes: seeing injustice and living in an unjust world and being tired of it. That there is nothing we can do to change it.

But like Rosa, we can all do small acts to challenge injustice and if we all did a small act, it would mount up to a larger change.

Let us pray.

God, thank you for Rosa Parks and all those who came before us who inspire us to stand up against injustice. May we have the strength of character and will to be like Rosa.

Amen.³

Hymn:

554 STF – In this place, with God's word OR

32 STF – Meet and right it is to sing

Readings: Isaiah 40:21-31; Psalm 147:1-11, 20c; 1 Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39

Hymn:

418 STF – We have a gospel to proclaim OR

657 STF – You give rest to the weary

Reflections on the readings

I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who.

Rudyard Kipling - The Elephant's Child

The Revised Common Lectionary, one of the aspects of Christianity which is broadly shared across all denominations – the standard three-year cycle of set readings for each Sunday across the year designed to be a prompt for preachers to explore the Bible and often used as a framework for Sunday worship services in many churches across the world.

As a preacher, my relationship status with the Lectionary is, shall we say, “complicated”.

I do usually tend to start there as I prepare my services. Sometimes I am struck instantly with something that I feel inspired to explore which can be quite exhilarating. Other times I feel nothing at all, and look elsewhere for a thread. There are also times when I can be fairly well down the road with a particular theme, then something will happen in the world, or

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Annan-Hood

in my world, and that can change the direction of where worship will end up that week completely.

The other beautiful and fascinating thing about it is that I can look at the same readings more than once and find that different things speak to me on each occasion. There are also rare occasions when I may have led a service and I hear another that day by someone else using the very same readings and the content and message of each service could not be further apart from one another. I love this aspect of “being” with the Bible. If we believe it is “alive” and it finds ways to allow God to speak to us through sharing in the thoughts of the writers – and I do – then allowing ourselves to breathe and bend with it in these ways is crucial.

This week’s readings are a typical case in point. I know I have used them before and explored aspects of healing, I know I once tackled the topic of demons, and more than likely other things too, but this time something else entirely sprung out at me. Something “new”. So here goes...

What do you feel are the “responsibilities” of being a Christian?

[Depending on your setting this can either be rhetorical or asked to prompt a congregational discussion].

I think the readings this week give us a set of clues that help to define this answer. Let’s explore them together.

Isaiah:

There are a couple of aspects of this reading I really like.

“Have you not heard? Have you not known?” says the prophet.

You can sense Isaiah getting quite hot under the collar as his exasperation at the fact that people are not listening to the beauty of his prophecies and not “getting” what he finds quite obvious... that God is there for us all... that God loves us all... that God is promising comfort for us all...

The message is just as loud and clear for us today as it was for his listeners all those years ago.

“Have YOU not heard?”

“Can you hear God talking to YOU?”

Maybe today, we can be prodded by Isaiah’s exasperation at our own inability to grasp this message?

I also am very fond of the closing words in this passage.

When I became a Christian I was beautifully supported by many people, and by a small handful of people in particular... my wife was amazing, a couple of ministers really helped to steady my ship, plus I had the support and encouragement of a friend I have had for many years who I had made music with over the years. He sent me a card with these words on, and they have stayed with me since.

40:29 He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.

40:30 Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted;

40:31 but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

I have always felt that sense, somewhere, that when I am weary, I am held and supported.

We all get weary.

You may be weary now.

The support comes in many ways - invariably from the love and care of the people around me – assuming of course I am brave enough to open myself up to be vulnerable enough to receive that support – but I can feel a sense of those wings... to lift me, to help me run when I am tired, to help me walk when I feel faint.

Beautiful.

Maybe today, we can feel “lifted”?

Corinthians:

Evangelism. One of the more divisive words in Christian vocabulary.

There are broadly two camps when it comes to the principles of effective Evangelism. Whether you think it is right to proactively tell people the good news of Jesus and essentially tell them how wonderful their life could be if only they thought the same way, or whether you don't.

Full disclosure: I don't.

For me the far more effective way to evangelise is to allow faith to inspire us to behave in a way which might well draw people in... and we see some strong clues to this from Paul in this passage. I have had too many bad experiences of the other style – both before and after becoming a Christian.

Paul was a passionate follower of Christ. So often the depth of this passion is so obvious from his writings. We know he came to Jesus in a very dramatic way – literally like a bolt of lightning – and he was clearly willing to share this news with everyone at the time, and with us today. He tells here of how he goes about his life as he interacts with people.

He tells us he “became like” the different groups of people he met, and then how he aimed to “win” them:

9:20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law.

9:21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law.

9:22 To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.

His “becoming” a Jew did not mean he changed anything about his own beliefs or motivations, it means he moved alongside the people in that community, and spent time with them, and lived with them, and shared with them. His “winning” them did not mean a victory or defeat at all, it simply meant find a place of understanding, sharing and togetherness. He “walked a mile in their shoes”, we might say.

The same with “under the law”.

The same with “those outside the law”.

The same with “the weak”.

Let's continue this thread in today's terms:

- Might we be prepared to get alongside Muslims, to allow us to find a place of understanding together?
- Asylum seekers?
- Rival football fans?
- Folks from other Christian denominations, who may not see things the same way we do?

This message from Paul gives us a real steer about the nature of service and how we might live out our faith.

Maybe today, we can think of ways we might be able to reach out and share with folks who are “not like us”?

Mark:

So often this passage is read and talked about in terms of Jesus and healing. Who he heals, what he heals etc.

Simon’s mother-in-law was ill, and Jesus did indeed come to her and she started to feel better, but what happened next is what grabbed my attention.

The instant she felt better, she got up and started work.

She served.

There is a true sense of the obligation she felt to help those around her, as soon as she was physically able. This was what she did. This is what WE do, as part of our Christian faith, because this is what Jesus asked us to do through the way he lived his life.

It’s reminiscent of the time Jesus called some fishermen to become his followers. “Immediately”, they dropped their nets and followed. Whatever actually happened, the gospel writers felt it important to let us know how quickly and powerfully they were compelled. And the same sense of urgency is apparent here.

Maybe today, we can be aware of our urge to “do” or to “serve”, and find a way to follow those urges?

We heard some words earlier from Rudyard Kipling.

Let’s go back to looking at our Christian responsibilities - our “job description”, if you like. How can we use today’s messages to help with this?

We can use Kipling’s words to help us. The framework of his “six honest men” is used for problem solving and project management the world over. So here goes:

- What? – We serve. We look for others in need. As long as we are able, we look out for others who may need our help. In addition to this, if we happen to be the ones in need, we open ourselves up to receiving the help too. This is equally as important.
- Why? – Because this was the message of Jesus in its simplest and purest form. Plus of course, we are assured of God’s help when we are weary, and we can be lifted up on wings like eagles...
- When? - Now! At once! Immediately! – get the message?
- How? – We humble ourselves to care enough to get alongside people to want to get to know about them, to listen. We seek to wear the other person’s moccasins for a while. We resist the temptation to tell them what they should believe!
- Where? - Wherever you find yourself.
- Who? – You.

There you go. It’s as simple as that, at least for this week.

Thank you, Rudyard Kipling.

Thank you, Revised Common Lectionary.

Thank you, God.

Amen.⁴

⁴ Reflection written by Kev Dobson

Hymn:

465 STF – Guide me, O thou great Jehovah OR

707 STF – Make me a channel of your peace

Prayers of intercession

Look up (for example) the BBC News website (World, National and Local) and read out some of the headlines one by one.

You may feel inspired to say a few words to widen the topic of each news item (for example if a headline is about a new government policy on plastics, you may wish to mention the overall issue of climate change and care for the environment) or it may be appropriate to leave it at the headline alone.

After this you might wish to mention, in turn, any issues that are relevant to the local church or church family.

After each statement, allow some time to ponder then repeat the following response:
(please ensure everyone is briefed on the response before the payers start, and/or include in any printed material or projected material)

Leader: Listen Lord Jesus, let my fears be few...

All: Walk one step before me, and I will follow you.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Gracious God, we give you praise for your goodness to us. Take these gifts, and use them in the ongoing transformation of the world, in the name of all that is good, and right, and just and loving.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

658 STF – A charge to keep I have OR

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

Blessing

Go and enter into the flow of love that is at work in the universe.

Go and discover that God is out there, moving, transforming, touching lives and all creation.

Go and encounter the Spirit of God.

Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Kev Dobson

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker