

twelvebaskets



EASTER 5B

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

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Fifth Sunday After Easter - Year B
28th April 2024



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

30 STF – Jesus, stand among us OR

443 STF – Come, let us sing of a wonderful love

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

608 STF – All praise to our redeeming Lord OR

617 STF – O blessed spring, where Word and sign

Readings: Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 22:25-31; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8

Hymn:

409 STF – Let us build a house where love can dwell OR

258 STF – You are the vine

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

615 STF – Let love be real, in giving and receiving OR

663 STF – I, the Lord of sea and sky

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

410 STF – Lord, your church on earth is seeking OR

347 STF – Crown him with many crowns

Blessing

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Call to worship

Centre us on you again, O God.

Help us to turn aside from the busy-ness and business of the day, to meet with you again in this space.

Come amongst us, Holy and remarkable God,
By your Spirit we pray,

Amen.¹

Hymn:

30 STF – Jesus, stand among us OR

443 STF – Come, let us sing of a wonderful love

Opening Prayers

Journeying God, receive our adoration today for you have always been on the move;

- you moved by your Spirit over the face of the waters at creation, and brought forth order and life,
- you met Abram under the night sky, Moses in the wilderness, Ruth in a strange land, Esther in danger,
- you travelled with your people from slavery to freedom, guiding them with fire and cloud,
- when humanity failed, you continued to give grace, goodness and love in abundance.

Journeying God, receive our thanks today, for you have travelled with us in all the wanderings of our lives;

- in times of wilderness, you have drawn alongside us
- in times of fruitfulness, you have increased our joy
- in times of sorrow, you have been our rod and staff
- when we have felt lost, the light of your resurrection has illuminated the way ahead.

Journeying God, we confess that we have not always been the companions you might have hoped for;

- when we prefer our own way, forgive us and guide us back to the path
- when we ignore those on the road who need encouragement, forgive us and renew our love
- when we complain about the journey, forgive us and give us new strength
- in all our journeying, may we abide in you as you abide in us.

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

Journeying God, we thank you for the forgiveness you offer in Christ Jesus.

May we be renewed in our faith to go out and bear good fruit, fruit that will last.

We pray in the name of Jesus and the power of the Spirit.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

The word "love", in the New International Version of the Bible, appears 686 times. Now we use the word "love" in English to describe many different things:

*(After each item with a * , ask and encourage the congregation to give examples and why they love them.)*

- We love our favourite sports teams.*
- We love our family, even when we fight with them.
- We love our favourite restaurants, and a particular item from that menu.*
- We love music.*
- We love something we are wearing.
- We love TV shows, and make sure we watch it when its on.*
- We love our friends.

Now, "love" in the English language can cover all different types of love. In the Bible, specifically in the original Greek, the word "love" actually can be described as four different types of Love:

- Agape, or brotherly love
- Eros, or romantic love
- Philia, or dispassionate love
- Storge, or friendly love

Love, in all its forms, is something we all experience in some way or another. In experiencing love, we also experience and know God. Love is, as is God, transformative, powerful, and something we all experience. When we say that God is present in this space in our prayers, its true because prayer is a moment to pause and reflect and be aware of the encompassing love that is God.

Or to put it another way:

(Read 1 John 4: 16 – 21 in a version you are comfortable with)

Love is at the key of who we are, who God wants us to be. And love is powerful as God is powerful. Dr Martin Luther King Jr. put it as: "We must discover the power of love, the

² Opening prayers written by Jill Baker

redemptive power of love. And when we discover that, we will be able to make of this old world a new world, for love is the only way.”

Love is the way. Love changes people. Love opens us up. And love unites us in the arms of God.

Let us pray.

God of Love, who is in us and around us, may we reflect your love to others. Help us to discover the power of love in our communities, and that love becomes the basis for bringing the kin-dom here.

Amen.³

Hymn:

608 STF – All praise to our redeeming Lord OR

617 STF – O blessed spring, where Word and sign

Readings: Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 22:25-31; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8

Hymn:

409 STF – Let us build a house where love can dwell OR

258 STF – You are the vine

Reflections on the readings

I John 4:7-21: Just Love

Over the years, we have conveniently bracketed and narrowed ‘love for one another’ as love for our inner-circle of family and friends, making love a domestic affair and a private affair, with no engagement with the dynamics of power in our love for one another. On the other hand, we don’t fall back on the language of ‘justice’ and ‘equity’ in our domestic lives, thinking these are secular words that people use out in the public sphere. This bifurcation of love as private and justice as public, is not only unhelpful but also unspiritual, for justice and love co-exist and co-work together, which has been demonstrated in the life and witness of Jesus Christ in his mission and ministry. Alluding Cornel West’s expression, “justice is what love looks like in the public,”⁴ justice is the visible action of the invisible love, and love is the bedrock for justice.

The relationship of love and justice from I John 4:7-12.

First things first, **God is the source of love**, (because love is from God 7b), God’s self is love (for God is love 8b), God is the service of love (God’s love is revealed by sending God’s son to the world 9) and God is the strength of love (not that we loved God, but that he loved us 10). In other words, any idea or thought or action of love begins with and from God, for no love exists outside of the divine. The being of God is love, the becoming of God

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Annan-Hood

⁴ <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2019/03/08/cornel-west-and-robert-p-george-christian-love-public-square>

is love and the belonging of God is love, for nothing exists outside of God's love. If it is love, then is about the divine, and if it is divine, it will always be of love. Such a theological understanding of God as love and love as divine, describes the fairness in God's creation and in God's world. God's justice springs out of God's love, ensuring fairness and equity as determinants in the reign of God.

Secondly, **“whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love”** (8v). Who are those who do not love and therefore do not know God, who is love? Or why is it that there are some who do not love and why are there some who are never loved? This is where we recognise and explain that due to power imbalances that exist in the society on several counts like class, gender, race, colour, caste, religion, region, language etc. there are some people who do not love or there are some who are never loved. To put it in other words, due to existing imbalance of power dynamics within the society, fairness is affected, which we call injustice, which brings in a divide, some as powerful and others as powerless. Injustice is what makes some not to love, for they do not know God who is love. Structures and systems of injustice have taken deep roots in the society and that allowed the powerful to oppress and discriminate against the powerless, giving room to no love and ultimately leading to un-divine. Prestige, positions, prejudice, privilege have crept into the society as ramifications of power, making some not to love others, for they do not know God who is love. In other words, wherever and whenever injustice thrives and life is threatened, that is un-divine, not of God, and there is no place for love there. If we don't let go our privileges and closely examine how the forces of power imbalances are influencing us, we are empowering the injustices of the world around us today. The love of God and the knowledge of God challenges us to disrupt the unloving of creatures based on power, and convicts us to work for the justice of God by loving the creation with no conditions applying.

Thirdly, **God's love is revealed in God's son being sent into the world** so that we might live through him, and to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. God's love is revealed publicly by God's rupture into the world, by the demonstration of the in-breaking of love in the world, offering and affirming life to all, by the act of incarnation which is solidarity with the powerless. This act of God, reveals the justice character of the divine, which is risking to be in the unjust world, giving away his life so that life is offered to all and taking on the criminal death on the cross publicly for standing up to the cause of a just world, which the writers understood as an atoning sacrifice for the injustices of the world. Just love therefore is going out into the public square to offer life for all, to be in solidarity with the weak and powerless, to stand up against the principalities and powers, speaking truth to the powers and advocating for justice, even up to the point of dying for others for the cause of the justice reign of God.

The logic of empire, which is demonstrated by violence wants to destroy bodies by killings, scatter bodies through terror acts, crucify bodies by unjust crucifixions, disappear bodies by torture, and disintegrate the bio-politics of life. The war in Gaza, Palestine, in Ukraine and several other places of conflict are the cases in point here. In contrast to this, the love of God receives and embraces bodies into their fold, and receives the material bodies. Those that are embraced by the love of God, are called to receive the broken-hearted and partake in the healing of their broken bodies.

Fourthly, since **God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another**. Justice is spiralling, for it has after effects. Since God has revealed God's love for a just world, God invites each of us to strive for justice by loving one another transcending all barriers and trespassing all boundaries. By loving one another, which is to affirm mutual self-respect and self-dignity in one another, we will let God live in us and allow God's love to be perfected in us. By loving one another we will all strive for a just world, where God dwells and God's justice thrives. Justice is imperative for Christian discipleship. Since God loved us justly, we ought to love one another justly, and there are no two thoughts on it.

Love for the 'other' particularly the 'outsiders', the 'powerless' and the 'vulnerable' is the yardstick to demonstrate the grace of God in each of our lives and communities. As churches we have been busy trying to keep up the status quo of our church memberships and have been engrossed in putting our energies for the survival of the church buildings and its properties. Feeding the hungry, giving a drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick and visiting the imprisoned, these hexagonal representative acts of love in action to the vulnerable people, should be the mission mandate of our churches. When our mission engagements are in such a direction, we are truly serving Christ the love. Church is all about serving in love in the community, outside the walls of our church building, particularly the vulnerable people. No one has ever seen God, if we love one another, God lives in us, the Easter story becomes relevant and God's love is perfected in the creation.

Amen.⁵

Hymn:

615 STF – Let love be real, in giving and receiving OR

663 STF – I, the Lord of sea and sky

Prayers of intercession

God of the rivers in our towns, cities and villages,
flow into our lives, into our churches, into our boroughs, into our circuits, into our districts,
into our connexion, into our nation and into our world,

so that we water every seed that is sown for the flourishing of life,
so that we quench the thirst of the people, especially those on the margins,
so that we offer freshness to life, caring for our planet and for our neighbours,
so that we flow like justice that flows like an ever-flowing stream
and strive for life, love and peace for the entire creation.

Flow in us and flow through us God of the river.

In Jesus, the living waters name we pray.

God of peace and justice,
In the light of the unholy sights of violence and death in the Holy land,
as people of faith(s) we come unto you crying for an immediate ceasefire.

Let those in power act on such a call,
making them humane in saving lives.

An eye for an eye leads to a 'dead'-end,
for choosing that way can never lead to a peaceful end.

In this increasingly grave humanitarian crisis,
Open the doors, open the hearts, open the minds
For love and life to survive and sustain.

We offer ourselves to seek for justice and to work for peace. Amen

⁵ Reflection written by Raj Patta

As risen Jesus, you O God appeared to the frightened disciples and offered them the peace of God, granting them hope, courage and confidence in facing the life situations.

We draw to your presence our gracious God, and pray for the world around us.

We specially pray for people who are reeling in fear, anxiety and loneliness.

You are our Good Shepherd, and grant your comfort and peace to all people in such situations.

May your healing be on this world, and help us to know that you are a God, who is constantly walking with us.

We remember people whose mental health is affected, who are in trauma, help us to recognise you in our boat to still the storm and let your peace, love and grace prevail in all our lives.

We ask this prayer in Jesus, our friend's name.

Amen.⁶

We will now take up the offering.

Today, as all days, we are grateful for all of your love for us, Lord God, and for the gift of this new day.

Thank you for all the ways in which you are at work in this world and in our world. May your grace reign in me, and in my life, and may your Spirit bless these gifts that lives might be changed and justice brought closer by their use,

Amen.⁷

Hymn:

410 STF – Lord, your church on earth is seeking OR

347 STF – Crown him with many crowns

Blessing

This is the day that the Lord has made,
As you go out into the remainder of this day, and the week ahead,
May you experience the Creator God, the Christ-light and the Holy Spirit at work,

Amen.⁸

⁶ Prayers of intercession written by Raj Patta

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁸ Additional prayers by Tim Baker