



ORDINARY 16C

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



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

489 STF – All I once held dear OR

67 STF – This, this is the God we adore

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

362 STF – Meekness and majesty, manhood and deity OR

254 STF – Seek ye first the kingdom of God

Readings: Amos 8:1-12; Colossians 1:15-28; Luke 10:38-42

Hymn:

544 STF – As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after you OR

560 STF – My eyes be open to your presence

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

293 STF – All heaven declares the glory of the risen Lord OR

495 STF – Dear Lord and Father of mankind forgive our foolish ways

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

319 STF – Christ triumphant, ever reigning OR

703 STF – In an age of twisted values we have lost the truth we need

Blessing

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Call to worship

Into the midst of your presence, we come, Holy Lord.
Into the hope of your Spirit, we come, Holy Lord.
Into this time of worship, we come, Holy Lord.
Show us how to follow you, today, we pray,
Living, loving Lord,

Amen.¹

Hymn:

489 STF – All I once held dear OR
67 STF – This, this is the God we adore

Opening Prayers

Loving God,
Like travellers after a long journey,
we come to you today:
In need of rest,
In need of shelter,
In need of sustenance.

Restore our weary bodies that we have strength for the journey ahead.

Like small children worn out after a long day's adventuring,
we come to you today:
In need of love,
In need of safety,
In need of replenishment.

Restore our tired minds that we have energy to adventure again tomorrow.

Like creatures of the wild bedding down after a long day of survival, we come to you
today: Ready to stop,
Ready to listen
And open to simply resting in your presence.

Replenish us today with your love, wisdom and peace.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Hannah Baker

All Age Talk

Today's reading from Paul's letter to the Colossians includes one of the most famous verses in the Bible, and one which has united many people in difficult times. Colossians 1 and verse 17 reads 'In Christ, all things hold together'.

It is a simple verse, and easy to remember because it is so short! Perhaps it is one you could commit to memory this week, so this reassuring and helpful thought can keep coming back to you in the months ahead. In Christ, all things hold together.

Despite its simplicity, it is a crucial verse in helping us reflect on how the world works, and who Jesus is in the midst of all the challenges and pain we face in our lives, see in the news, worry about in our families and communities. Amongst all that seems like it is trying to drive us apart, all the arguments, all the separation, all the breakdown of communities, God in Christ is bringing us back together – or at least trying to.

This simple verse is also a reminder of the role we have to play. If we want to get involved in whatever it is that God is 'up to' in the places we call home, then we need to look out for opportunities to bring, and hold, people together. Wherever there is unit amongst division, healing of community breakdown, restoration and forgiveness, God is there. The Christ is there.

Are there people, places, situations and relationships which need to know the presence of this healing Christ today? Can you be the hands and the feet that help to hold all things together?³

Hymn:

362 STF – Meekness and majesty, manhood and deity OR

254 STF – Seek ye first the kingdom of God

Readings: Amos 8:1-12; Colossians 1:15-28; Luke 10:38-42

Hymn:

544 STF – As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after you OR

560 STF – My eyes be open to your presence

Reflections on the readings

Ripe and ready? Or has the rot set in?

[Having a real basket of fruit available would be great for this reflection. Some items should be deliciously ripe and ready to eat, but others on the turn, showing mould, rot or decay. Show the basket around and ask which items appeal and which don't. Have fun with someone biting into a delicious ripe strawberry (for example) and enjoying it, but teasing someone else to eat a rotten, mouldy apple. Ask what might be done with the mouldy pieces. Recycled food waste? Compost?]

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Baker

We think the Prophet Amos lived about 750 years before Christ and we know for sure, from our reading today, that he had a massively tough calling from God to carry out during those times. Here's a mighty clue about what that was in chapter 8 verse 2 of our Amos reading today. 'Then the Lord said to me, "The end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass them by.'"

In other words, God will never again let them off the hook. Will never again let evil 'pass over' them as God had done so amazingly in the times of Moses when Israel been told to mark the doorposts of their homes with lambs' blood so they could be protected from plague. We can read about this in Exodus 12.

Moses was called in his time to preach preservation and hope. Poor old Amos is called to preach destruction and doom. Here's a cheerful list – not – of what was to come. Songs shall become wailings. Dead bodies shall be many. And, historically, we know that was the case because the Assyrian people conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel both in 732 and 722 BCE. The land will tremble. Famine will come upon you. People will be running here and there in panic. And perhaps, most awful of all, there will be baldness on every head. No looking around the congregation at this point please. Possibly a line to make us smile at one level, but not perhaps for people who've felt deeply distressed to lose their hair, maybe from chemotherapy treatment? (The Bible actually has a lot more to say than we might think about the symbolism of baldness and shaved heads, but that's a reflection for another day!) Here, it just conveys one more depressing message. Ruin is on its way, and that means your hairdo as well.

Something has gone really rotten, just like that decaying fruit in the basket. It's a moral decay that we're talking about here. God's chosen people who were supposed to shine a beacon of light for love, justice and mercy to the whole world are in fact trampling on the needy and ruining the poor (verse 4). They can't wait for annoying religious festivals to be over so they can start trading and profit making again. That reminds me of a village Harvest Festival where produce was sold off for Church funds after the worship service, except very few people came to the actual service. In fact there'd be a queue outside the door during the last hymn as folk waited to leap in and get a bargain cauliflower straight after the Benediction. The days of Amos are still with us perhaps.

But going back to this basket of fruit, it's a very powerful image indeed that Amos uses and worth spending a bit more time on. This reflection isn't being offered in the beautiful Hebrew language of the Old Testament today, but if it was, we'd hear a clever play on words. The word for 'summer fruit' and the word for the 'end' of things sound very similar in Hebrew. So, this basket is presented to us as containing, on the one hand, the blessings of summer fruit; ripe, ready, juicy and life giving. But also as a container of produce which is rapidly nearing the end of its life. A basket of dying and death. A fruit basket in the time of Amos would have been full of that region's plenty of course - pomegranates, figs, and grapes, possibly olive oil and wine would be there too from the pressing of the fruits. Beautiful indeed. But, oh dear. Take a look at that nasty grey mould growing around the good things; see the maggots and smell the rot. It's a basket containing a whole lot of trouble too.

I wonder if summer fruit was on the menu at Martha and Mary's village house when Jesus was visiting. We read about this earlier in Luke chapter 10. It doesn't actually say that Jesus ate anything on that occasion, so it's possible we're putting food in his mouth and words into Luke's text that we shouldn't be doing. But frankly, we do hear that Jesus was welcomed into their home and, culturally, a welcome would have been nothing without food. So Martha's many tasks, we can pretty much assume, were around food preparation for a guest. She'd be picking out the ripe and ready fruits, wouldn't she, to serve with love and care. She wouldn't be offering mouldy, decaying ones to the Teacher. It's a story of generous hospitality and attention to Jesus.

Just as immediately beforehand, in verses 29-37, there's the story of generous hospitality and attention to someone who's been robbed and left 'half dead' on the road. A Samaritan, of all people, pulls out the best fruits he has to offer: compassion, bandages, oil, wine, money, transport and accommodation to give this beaten up stranger the best chance of life again. Here's a Samaritan foreigner putting the Israel of Amos's times to shame. The Samaritan is not trampling on the needy. Nor bringing ruin to the poor. (Amos 8.4). Entirely the opposite.

Now then. What's in OUR fruit basket today? You and I. What are the life lessons God want to teach us from the contents?

Has mould and decay set in with us? Politically? Morally? Amos wanted to show corrupt, profit obsessed Israel that mould and decay had indeed set in with them and that the end was near. We can't help but look at our world today and notice similar signs of the end times, though none of us knows when the date on the calendar will be and it's a bit pointless spending energy trying to predict it when there's so much else to be getting on with. But we see all too clearly situations where the rich 'practice deceit with false balances', (Amos 8.5) and where God's precious people break God's heart with their rottenness. How appalling it is in war zones, for example, when the powerful don't even allow basic food and medical provisions to get through their blockades and barriers, leaving innocent children screaming in hunger and pain. Yes, we know that happens even today, in 2025 nearly 3,000 years after the times of Amos. What actions for justice can we gird our loins for to combat this kind of horror?

On the other hand, are we ourselves ripe and ready fruits, maybe in the summer or autumn of our years, staying fresh not mouldy in the ways we follow Jesus, show compassion, act for justice and live the Gospel. One small Chapel in our neck of the woods was led, after lots of prayer and discussion, to start some very simple children's and youth work recently; opening the Chapel doors, offering tabletop games, hot chocolate, and a pause for thought. Simply wanting to be present to local children as Christ's people in that place and not be a closed shop. It's been a really tough call. Sweetness and light are in short supply among some younger friends who come along and everyone's exhausted at the end of a session! But it has possibility, by God's grace and in God's strength. And the leaders of this group are all ripe fruits, well into their 60s, 70s and beyond...

Martha and Mary's fruit basket remains an interesting one. Filled with the activity of catering and hospitality, which can be God's holy work without a doubt, But, if we're not careful, might just leave us frenzied and distracted as Jesus truthfully points out. Can you think of Churches where the baking, buying and selling of cake seems to have become an end in itself, sapping more energy than anything else? Luke's Gospel presents Mary, on this occasion, as the attentive, listening one. Maybe Mary represents ripened, fruitful ears of wheat. Maybe there'll be a harvest to be gathered in from her.

As we move into another week of being God's people, in Jesus' name and in the power of the Holy Spirit, let's pray that we may be ripe and ready. And that we don't let the rot set in. Amen.⁴

Hymn:

293 STF – All heaven declares the glory of the risen Lord OR

495 STF – Dear Lord and Father of mankind forgive our foolish ways

⁴ Reflection written by Val Ogden

Prayers of intercession

(Invite the response in bold to be made by everyone, practising it a few times in advance of the prayer so it can be recited rhythmically and easily from memory, or have it available on screen or paper).

Day by day, day by day, of You - Dear Lord - three things we pray:

To see You more clearly, love You more dearly, and follow You more nearly, day by day.

Day by day, we ask for the vision to see you more clearly, especially in the faces, bodies and lives of those we least expect to reveal you. We long to see you more clearly in the actions of the most powerful people on earth; seeing those who have exploited others change their ways dramatically. We long to see you more clearly through the Bible as we wrestle with its wisdom and terror. We long to see you more clearly in one another, and to hear you speak, Lord. Although Scripture says we see through a glass darkly while on earth, please grant us clarity to see exactly what you would have us do and be for you, day by day, in these testing times for Christian faith and life.

Day by day, day by day, of You - Dear Lord - three things we pray:

To see You more clearly, love You more dearly, and follow You more nearly, day by day.

Day by day, we commit ourselves to expressing more love for You, Lord, through our words and actions. We pray for Your gracious help as we try to love you more dearly by caring for our aching planet; by speaking out with firm, brave and risky love in situations crying out for that; by going the extra mile when we are already weary, and by holding Your cross before our eyes when we walk into a future that scares us. On the days when our love for You grows weak, thank you that Your love for us burns more fiercely than ever. It is more than we deserve and we are deeply grateful.

Day by day, day by day, of You - Dear Lord - three things we pray:

To see You more clearly, love You more dearly, and follow You more nearly, day by day.

Day by day, we want to track the footsteps of Jesus and in them plant our own. We pray for the grace to do this well in the present age. Loving God, help us follow our Saviour Jesus into places which are deeply uncomfortable for us and to draw on his wisdom and strength. May Jesus lead us, his followers, into every meeting, project and enterprise of our Churches, not the other way around with our footmarks and agendas going ahead of him. We pray that in following You, Lord Jesus, Your leadership lessons will rub off on us as we watch you as servant-king, wise teacher, opponent of hypocrites, friend of children and so much more. May our following of You inspire others to follow and never deter them.

Day by day, day by day, of You - Dear Lord - three things we pray:

To see You more clearly, love You more dearly, and follow You more nearly, day by day.

Amen.⁵

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Val Ogden

We will now take up the offering.

God of all creation, we give you these gifts now – and invite you to bless them and to use them for your purposes. May we bring about redemption for a world in disaster, hope for a people in despair.

By your Spirit and in the name of Christ,
Amen.⁶

Hymn:

319 STF – Christ triumphant, ever reigning OR

703 STF – In an age of twisted values we have lost the truth we need

Blessing

We shall go out with joy, and be sent forth with peace.
We shall seek to know you more, Lord Jesus, and to follow in your way.
We hold together, in you, Jesus the Christ,
Amen.⁷

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker