

# twelvebaskets



## ORDINARY 17C

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

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## **Order of Service**

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**34 STF – O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness OR**

**20 STF – Be still for the presence of the Lord**

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**64 STF – Praise is rising, eyes are turning to you OR**

**254 STF – Seek ye first the kingdom of God**

Readings: Hosea 1:2-10; Psalm 85; Colossians 2:6-15; Luke 11:1-13

**Hymn:**

**390 STF – My God! I know, I feel thee mine OR**

**763 STF – Our Father in heaven**

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**318 STF – Christ, our King before creation OR**

**591 STF – Let all mortal flesh keep silence**

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

**503 STF – Love divine all loves excelling OR**

**313 STF – Thine be the glory**

Blessing

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## Call to worship

Come let us sing to our God,  
Come let us pray to our Creator,  
Come let us worship Jesus the Christ,  
Come let us be transformed by the Spirit.  
Come with me, come wander,  
Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## Hymn:

34 STF – O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness OR  
20 STF – Be still for the presence of the Lord

## Opening Prayers

Let us pray,  
God of the Heavens and of the Earth,  
We bring to you today all that is well with our souls.

In times of warmth,  
In times of sunshine,  
And when we see nothing but rainbows –  
May you rejoice with us in all that is glorious.

We bring to you today all that we feel less clear about, in ourselves and in that which is happening around us.

In times of sleet,  
In times of fog,  
And when we find ourselves surrounded by clouds –  
May you sit with us in the haze and remind us that we are not alone.

We bring to you today all that weighs us down.

When thunder booms,  
When lightning strikes,  
And when hailstones pelt upon our shoulders;  
May you give us shelter from the storm.

We bring to you today all that feels cold within our hearts.

In mounds of snow,  
Through shards of ice,  
And when everything around us feels frozen –  
May you thaw us with the summer heat of your everlasting love.

Whatever the weather around us or within us,  
may we sense your love for us and know that we are safe.

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Call to worship written by Tim Baker

<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by Hannah Baker

## **We say together the Lord's Prayer**

### **All Age Talk**

Take a minute right now, to just imagine yourself on holiday in a place you have never been before. You've never been there, but a friend of yours has and tells you that there is a really, really nice ice-cream shop somewhere in the village, but it's rather hidden, and it's not always open, your friend hopes you'll be able to find it, as it sells the best salted caramel ice cream in the world.

You arrive in the village, it's a hot day, and you can't stop thinking about ice cream. From the car on your way to the campsite you peered out of the window at what you could see, but couldn't see an ice cream shop – but then, your friend said it was hidden. As soon as the tent is up you suggest a family walk back into the village, and you make sure someone in the family has some money... up and down the high street you walk, but no sign of an ice cream shop anywhere. The rest of the family are getting a bit fed up with your determination to look up every little gap and footpath so in the end you pluck up courage to go into the Post Office and ask where the ice cream shop is. Everyone thinks you're a bit mad, as the Post Office sells ice cream too, but you know that's not the ice cream you're looking for... and the Post Office staff know that too, for straightaway the woman behind the counter leans over and, with eyes alight, says, 'Ah, you know our village secret then? We make the best chocolate chip ice cream in the world, but you won't find it easily...'. She mutters some directions and draws a scribbly little map on the back of an old envelope. 'Good luck with your searching!'

Complaining quite loudly now, the family follow you back down the high street, between two shops selling clothes, through something which looks like an abandoned back garden and into a tiny courtyard. No-one is around, and there are no signs anywhere to be seen – this can't be the right place. The only thing in the courtyard is an old-fashioned barn door in the corner, painted pale green – hardly a colour to attract attention.

The family think it's time to give up and go back to the Post Office for an ordinary ice cream, but you can't give up yet... there is only one more thing you can think of to do, so you do it, you march up to the door and bang very loudly on the door with your fist. Silence follows and you feel yourself going red – why on earth did you do that? But just as you are about to turn away, the top half of the door opens and a cheery man looks out, carrying a rainbow-striped umbrella. 'Good afternoon', he says, looking straight at you, 'You wouldn't be looking for an ice cream, would you? We make the best raspberry ripple in the world!'

Sometimes, it takes effort to track down really good things... and Jesus suggests that God has lots of good things on offer which might just be worth a bit of investigation. Don't settle for an ordinary life, but ask those you see who have something special about there, where they found it; listen to what they say and search for more in life. Although sometimes that might feel like a waste of time, don't be afraid to knock on doors of opportunity until you find the best life in the world!<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> All Age Talk written by Tim Baker

**Hymn:**

64 STF – Praise is rising, eyes are turning to you OR

254 STF – Seek ye first the kingdom of God

**Readings:** Hosea 1:2-10; Psalm 85; Colossians 2:6-15; Luke 11:1-13

**Hymn:**

390 STF – My God! I know, I feel thee mine OR

763 STF – Our Father in heaven

**Reflections on the readings**

When was the last time you got lost? Perhaps you set out knowing exactly where you were heading, but things got muddled somewhere along the way. Perhaps your surroundings looked different from what you'd remembered, or where you were heading wasn't quite what you'd expected. Perhaps the signs mapping out the route had been covered up by overgrown shrubbery, or the road signs hadn't been updated!

I think that today's psalm shows us something of a journey. In fact, I think we find the psalmist at the midway point on their journey and feeling a bit disorientated. They are not quite sure where they are. As the psalm sets out, the writer looks back on the past – the way that has gone before them. They begin with a confident voice. They know that before, God has "restored the fortunes" of their ancestors, forgiven them and tuned away from anger. Whilst we don't hear the full picture of what happened to make God angry with people, or why they needed to receive forgiveness, we get the idea that the writer knows that even when we get a bit lost, God meets us with forgiveness. It's almost like they are retracing their steps and remembering the path well-trodden, by generations before them.

But as the psalm continues, this certainty becomes more fragile. The psalmist wanders into some doubt, that this well-trodden path of God's goodness and forgiveness is the path they find themselves on now. They cry out to God: "will you be angry with us forever?", "will you not revive us again?". Here, we feel the psalmist's disorientation. As they look around them, they are losing confidence that the way ahead holds the same offering of God's goodness and forgiveness that shaped the way before. We can hear in the psalmist's voice a sense of weariness, a tiredness perhaps from seeking to discern the way ahead. They are longing for God to restore them, revive them again – bring them new life. They want to see a sign, to hear God's voice to show them that God will continue to be faithful. They are struggling to trust.

This sense of disorientation might feel familiar to you. Sometimes, even when we are very familiar with the stories of God's goodness that have gone before, we can struggle to trust that they might be true today. Perhaps you sit in church, or read the Bible, and feel like the stories we hear are from a time far away. Perhaps you even hear stories or experiences from people in your community or family, about how God has been present in their lives, that feel very different from where you are. You might find yourself somewhere along the journey and struggling to find the way ahead, like the psalmist.

But, thankfully, this is not where the psalm ends. In the midst of their disorientation, the psalmist turns back to a voice of certainty – but this time, it's not about the past, but the future. What meets the psalmist in their uncertainty is not easy answers, or direct solutions

to the challenges they are facing. They don't get the clear sign or word they have been appealing for. Instead, they are reminded of the character of God that will shape the path ahead:

"Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;  
Righteousness and peace will kiss each other."

Steadfast love, faithfulness, righteousness and peace. Now, this isn't quite the vivid prophecies of the Old Testament that paint a picture of what's to come. The psalmist's picture here is less like a road sign pointing the way and more like the landscape lines on a map. They show how the terrain of the way ahead, the ups and downs, will be shaped by God's faithfulness and goodness. It might not be a landscape that is familiar, but the psalmist draws on them, confident that if they trust in God, that "righteousness will go before him" and God "will make a path for his steps."

In many ways, our two readings from the New Testament for today add some more detail to the map, helping us to take steps towards the future with confidence. Our reading from Colossians is from a letter, written to members of an early Christian community who themselves were struggling to step confidently into the life with God they were longing for. The letter tells us that they are struggling to shake off the practices and habits that they held before they began to follow Jesus. They are still distracted by the influence of other people and cultures around them. Perhaps, they are finding themselves at a similar place of disorientation to our psalmist.

In the letter, the writer confronts their disorientation and meets them with the fullness of the new life Jesus brings. They are reminded that just as Jesus Christ came to be the fullness of God living amongst the people, so in Jesus's life and death they too are invited into this fullness. This changes everything. Instead of the feeling of disorientation, or a sense of loss or lacking guidance for the way ahead, the letter reminds the people struggling that "God made you alive together with him". It is this new life that invites them to step forward, trusting that God will lead them into fullness.

In neither the psalm or the passage from Colossians is the answer to confusion and disorientation a clear instruction of what to do next. On both occasions, what makes the next steps clearer is a confidence that the way ahead will be shaped and steered by God's goodness. This is an invitation to trust, even when the way around you is unclear. In Luke 11, we hear about another moment where we are invited to step into this trust. Some of these verses might sound very familiar – they show Luke's account of when Jesus gave the disciples what has become known as the Lord's prayer. But whilst these verses might have been reshaped into a clear format of words we are led through each week at church, in fact Jesus's words here and the story he goes on to tell are notable in that once again, they do not offer a complete and comprehensive guidance for how to pray. Instead of providing every answer, Jesus teaches the disciples to turn to God in their disorientation and draw on God's faithfulness to help them understand the way ahead.

Each of these three passages tell us something about what it means to be guided by God as we discern the way ahead. God's steadfast love, faithfulness, righteousness and peace are markers on the journey that help us to identify the next steps to take. In his guidance to the disciples in Luke 11, Jesus knows that even though he has told them and shown them many times, the disciples are likely to forget what they know to be true about God in times of challenge or trouble. So, he invites them to be in constant dialogue with God, always asking God to meet with them where they are at on the journey and help them to identify the way ahead. Sometimes, hearing God's answer might look different from what we expect, or show up in unlikely places.

In Malcolm Guite's poem 'First Steps, Brancaster', he reflects on his experience of taking his first walk outside after a period of time being inside because of a broken leg. The full poem is available to read on his website if you are interested.<sup>4</sup> His poem follows a similar pattern to our psalmist: he begins with a sense of uncertainty, but can remember the draw towards adventure and freedom he has known before. As he steps out, he is drawn forward by the world around him reminding him of new life:

"The reed-birds sing  
As heaven reaches down to touch the earth  
and circle her, revealing everywhere  
A lovely, longed for blue."

He describes how his steps forward are guided by the nature around him: "sea and salt marsh", "reed cutters cuttings" and the "long line of the sea" show him the way to go. This echoes how the psalmist in psalm 85 also sees the land react to show God's character:

"Faithfulness will spring up from the ground  
and righteousness will look down from the sky.  
The Lord will give what is good,  
and our land will yield its increase".

On both occasions, Guite and the psalmist see in nature the guidance they need, steering the way ahead. The last lines of Malcolm Guite's poem read:

"Tentative steps begin to break your bonds,  
You push on through the pain that sets you free,  
Towards the day when broken bones rejoice."

We can hear something of the unknown that is also reflected in each of the Bible passages we heard today. When we are disorientated and struggling to find the way ahead, it is by reaching out to God and asking for God's guidance on the journey that the path begins to emerge. Sometimes this means pushing on through things that feel difficult. But it is taking the first step forward that affirms God's presence around us, and encourages us to keep going with God on the journey.

### Discussion questions

- How do these passages resonate with a time in your life?
- How have you noticed God's guidance when you have struggled to work out the way ahead?
- What would you like to ask God for help or guidance with today?

### **Two activities that could stimulate reflection:**

*Invite people to turn into groups of two or three people, and give out one verse of Malcolm Guite's poem per group. Invite the small groups to discuss:*

- *What emotions do you hear in the poet's voice?*
- *What does the poet know or feel about the way ahead?*
- *How does this poem or these passages resonate with a time in your life?*

*If you are sitting around tables, give each person a small Tupperware or tray of sand. Invite them to use their fingers to draw lines in the sand, exploring new pathways. Invite*

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<sup>4</sup> <https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/2015/02/28/first-steps-brancaster/>

*them to reflect on a time or situation where they have felt or feel disorientated, and to ask for God's guidance.*<sup>5</sup>

**Hymn:**

318 STF – Christ, our King before creation OR

591 STF – Let all mortal flesh keep silence

**Prayers of intercession**

If you would like to, I invite you to turn one of your hands so that your palm faces upwards. Use your fingers on the other hand to draw paths or lines across your palm and hand.

Focus on the sense of movement, of travel. Perhaps slow down or speed up your movement. Keep doing this as we pray.

God who is with me on the journey,  
We hear about how you have journeyed beside people who have come before us,  
Walking beside them on the journey.  
We hear in the bible, and through the lives of people who have followed your way,  
How your steadfast love, goodness, faithfulness and peace have shaped the path they have travelled with you.  
Help us to take confidence that the path of your goodness is one that is well trodden.

Pause your movement and keep your finger still on your hand.

God who is beside us in every moment,  
I confess that I can sometimes feel disorientated.  
It feels like I can get lost on my journey with you, and struggle to see the way ahead.  
It sometimes feels like the world around me has shifted and changed,  
and that the things that once felt familiar and confident are harder to remember.

Help me to remember that in this moment you remain beside me.  
Help me to trust that if I turn towards you, you will meet me with the gift of full life, that I may be restored in you.

Move your finger around your hand again.

God who goes before me,  
Shape my path with your generous love.  
Help me to look out for signs of your character in the places, landscapes and people around me.  
Show me that your support will always be there for me,  
that your faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and your righteousness will look down on me from the sky.

Even when I do not know every twist and turn, up and down of the path ahead,  
revive my trust that you will faithfully guide my way.

Amen.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Reflection written by Hannah Fremont-Brown

<sup>6</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Hannah Fremont-Brown



## **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.<sup>7</sup>

## **Hymn:**

503 STF – Love divine all loves excelling OR

313 STF – Thine be the glory

## **Blessing**

Until that moment which Wesley describes as ‘casting our crowns before him, lost in wonder love and praise’, until heaven finally calls us home, we have a job to do, a role to play in bringing love and hope into a broken world. Let us go out and do that job this week.

Amen.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker

<sup>8</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker