

twelvebaskets



ORDINARY 30C

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

570 STF – As we gather, Father, seal us

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

370 STF – Breathe on me breath of God OR

367 STF – When I was lost, you came and rescued me

Readings: Joel 2:23-32; Psalm 65; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14

Hymn:

318 STF – Christ, our King before creation OR

412 STF – See how great a flame aspires

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

504 STF – May the mind of Christ my Saviour OR

556 STF – Just as I am, without one plea

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

486 STF – Who would true valour see OR

746 STF – For all the saints who showed your love

Blessing

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Call to worship

O come, O come, Lord God almighty,
Come amongst us in the quiet whisper of your Spirit,
Come and prompt us, guide us, inspire us,
And help us to leave this place, knowing ourselves loved by you,
Holy God,

Amen.¹

Hymn:

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

570 STF – As we gather, Father, seal us

Opening Prayers

God of the turning year,
As the veil between worlds grows thin,
we pause in the stillness of this season.

As the light fades and the earth begins to rest,
teach us to honour both life and death:
both holding on and letting go.

We remember those who have gone before us:
loved ones, ancestors, teachers and friends.
May their memories bless us,
and may their wisdom guide us.

As the final leaves fall,
help us to release what no longer serves us
and to make space for what lies ahead.

We give thanks for the fire that warms,
for the stories that sustain
and for the mystery that surrounds us.

Walk with us through the darkness
and help us to trust in the turning of the wheel
that even in endings, new beginnings are taking root.

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

[Before the service starts, or perhaps handed out as people are coming in; ensure everyone has access to a small cut out flames and pens to write/draw with.]

November is around the corner, and while the nights are getting darker and the weather colder, we might be thinking back to those warm summer days! Or maybe more accurately those nice warm summer days!

Before we get to those nights, we have All-Souls day next week, also known as Halloween. Now Halloween as it is now is more about dressing up as Spiderman, Barbie, Blippi or Bluey and going around knocking on doors and asking for sweets. This idea actually comes from the idea of guising, which has been done in Scotland, Wales and Ireland for over 500 years. It is the idea of dressing up in costume as the souls of those that are no longer with us, to welcome them among us and take offerings to them.

It is a time of gathering together as a community, to keep warm around the fire, and to tell stories of those who are no longer with us. It's the way in which we share the memories that keep the spirits of those who are no longer with us alive. And it's not just the stories that we share, we light a candle in remembrance of specific people. We go through old photos and laugh about what happened behind the photos. Different cultures do something similar, such as the Day of the Dead celebrations in Mexico, or you might have seen it in the movie Coco.

These acts of remembrance are, for us, not just something we do once a year. When we have communion, we are reminded of the words that Jesus said at the last supper:

'Take this and eat it. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

In the same way, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them...

When we take a moment to eat the bread and drink the wine, we are asked to remember Jesus. This act is something that all Christians have done since the very beginning, so everyone who has ever been in the community has done the very same thing as you do now. So, when we do this in remembrance of Jesus, we are also doing it for them as well.

The next time you do have communion, take that moment. Hold the elements of the bread and the wine. Look around you. Think on the memories and the stories you've been told. See the memories of those that have gone to glory around you. You've got some small pieces of paper flames with you. Over the next couple of minutes, I'd like you to take time to think of those people or memories you want to kindle today.

[Have a few moments of silence or play some quiet music. After a short moment, invite them to come forward with the words below to place these flames up at the front, perhaps on the communion table or something similar.]

Then, once you are done, bring them forward and offer them here for those memories to continue.

Amen.³

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Annan-Hood

Hymn:

370 STF – Breathe on me breath of God OR

367 STF – When I was lost, you came and rescued me

Readings: Joel 2:23-32; Psalm 65; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14

Hymn:

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Reflections on the readings

Going to church can be a tricky business. Someone can enter thinking: “I feel good here. I’m doing okay, God. Thank you that I haven’t fallen into temptation like some others I know. Bless me, Lord, that I can keep up the good work.”

Someone else though, may falter at the door: “I’ve got no right to be here, God. I’ve really fouled up and made a mess of life. Lord, if you can, please have mercy on me.”

In Jesus’ story, the surprising twist is that the first person – the confident one – may leave at odds with God, while the second – the desperate one – may leave right with God.

This parable invites us to ask a searching question: on what basis do I think I belong in God’s presence: by my own goodness, or by God’s grace? It reminds us that grace is God’s unearned, unstoppable love for us, given not because we’re worthy, but simply because God is all-good.

The first thing we do well to notice is that this tale is classic Jesus! It unsettles us, maybe even confuses us a little, but it always draws us back to God’s free mercy. This is the heart of the gospel: good news indeed! Grace! Mercy! The surprising, generous, and boundless love of God, even extended to the most unlikely people.

The tax collector in this story is not painted as a nice guy in spite of his profession—he’s a rogue! Meanwhile, the Pharisee is described as a genuinely good man. He’s trying very hard to do the right thing. He is voluntarily fasting twice a week, well beyond what his faith required. This wasn’t just legalism – he was generous, too. Financially, he’d be welcomed in any church.

So then, where does the Pharisee go wrong, and where does the tax collector get it right?

Well, notice the way the Pharisee’s praying is described: he seems more focused on reassuring himself than truly connecting with God. Though he mentions God, it’s almost as if he’s really talking to himself about himself.

But where the Pharisee really goes wrong is when he attempts to justify himself by making comparisons with others: “I thank you, God, that I’m not like some other people.”

He tries to find security by pointing to others he sees as worse.

This is all too common, isn’t it? We hear – or even say – things like, “Well I know I’m not perfect, but at least I’m not like *them*.” Or, “I don’t go to church much, but at least I’m not a hypocrite.”

When we stop to think, we can see how easy it is to slip into a kind of inverted humility.

There's an old Jewish story about a rabbi, a cantor, and a synagogue cleaner all preparing for the Day of Atonement. The rabbi beat his breast and said, "I am nothing. I am nothing." The cantor likewise beat his breast and said, "I am nothing. I am nothing." And then the cleaner beat his chest and said "I am nothing. I am nothing." To which the rabbi turned to the cantor and said, "Look who thinks he is nothing!"

This belies such a misconstruction of how God is and how our relationship with God is meant to be. Within God's extraordinary unconditional love, we're not to be jealous siblings hoping to attract more love by pitching ourselves as better than others. Our only justification for being in the presence of God is God's unconditional love for us.

Another story tells of a woman who is met by an angel at the gates of heaven. The angel said she needed 10,000 points to enter. The woman listed her good deeds – being part of a church, worshipping weekly, caring for others – and the angel gives her just a few points for each. Finally, the angel asked, "Do you think you'll get into heaven?" The woman sighed and replied, "Only by the grace of God will I be able to make it." "Exactly!" exclaimed the angel and opened wide the gates.

It is a most wonderful thing that we can draw close to God—but that's because it is God's desire that we do so, and his unconditional embrace that makes it possible.

It's sad when people spend their lives self-justifying and leave no room for grace. They may live pretty good, moral lives, but their self-justifications leave no space for God's grace to take hold. They go home unvindicated: not because God withheld mercy, but because they weren't ready to receive it.

C.S. Lewis once wrote, "A world of nice people, content in their own niceness, looking no further, turned away from God, would be just as desperately in need of salvation as a miserable world – and might even be more difficult to save."

So yes, going to church can be a tricky business, especially if we ever start to think it's about us proving ourselves worthy. But it truly can be the most life-changing, life-giving, life-enhancing experience... when we come knowing how much we need God's mercy and grace.

The Pharisee left unvindicated, not because God was unwilling to show mercy, but because he was unwilling to receive it. The tax collector left at peace because he knew he had no claim except God's mercy, and that was enough.

May we each come to God like that: empty-handed, open-hearted, and ready to go home right with God.

Oh yes, and please do mind the trap! The trap of whispering to ourselves: "Thank God I'm not like that Pharisee."

Questions for discussion:

1. What part of this story spoke to you or made you pause?
2. How does it feel to know that God welcomes us just as we are, with all our strengths and struggles?
3. What might it mean for you to come to God "empty-handed" and "open-hearted"?
4. How can we support one another in exploring faith and experiencing God's unconditional love together?

Amen.⁴

⁴ Reflection written by Leslie Newton

Hymn:

504 STF – May the mind of Christ my Saviour OR

556 STF – Just as I am, without one plea

Prayers of intercession

Gracious God,

Here we are, some carrying quiet confidence, others weighed down with doubt.

Meet us now in our prayers—where honesty is all we bring, and grace is all we hope for.

Open our ears to your voice, our eyes to your mercy, our hands to your healing.

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

For those wrestling with feelings of unworthiness,

standing hesitantly at the door of your love,

may they find peace in your welcome, forgiveness, and restoration.

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

For those caught in the snare of pride or comparison,

measuring worth by the world's standards,

remind us all that in your kingdom each person is precious beyond measure.

Teach us humility that flows from being deeply known and deeply loved.

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

We pray for our churches and communities, that they may be havens of welcome – places where doubts are shared, fears embraced, and grace celebrated together.

Help us bear one another's burdens and walk side by side in faith and friendship.

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

We lift before you the brokenness of our world – for those suffering violence, injustice, and poverty;

for refugees seeking safety and hope;

for leaders and nations striving for peace;

and for all who work for healing and reconciliation.

May your mercy flow through us as rivers of compassion and acts of justice.

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Loving God,

as we go from this place, may your grace shape our steps, your mercy fill our hearts,

and your peace settle within us, so we may carry your love into every corner of our lives.

In the name of Jesus, who shows us the way of grace, we pray.

Amen.⁵

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Leslie Newton

We will now take up the offering.

Your love is vast as the ocean O God,
And as we receive a fresh wave of it this day,
We give you thanks.
Help us to use what we have been given to help make this world a better place,
To bring justice and joy closer for ourselves, our community, and our world.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

486 STF – Who would true valour see OR

746 STF – For all the saints who showed your love

Blessing

Go from this place and time,
Knowing that you are guided and blessed as you go.
Go, knowing yourself loved and challenged,
Accepted and called,
Forgiven and inspired.

Go, with the love the Christ and the power of the Spirit within you,
Amen.⁷

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker