



LENT 3A

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



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

372 STF – Come down, O Love divine OR

24 STF – Come, now is the time to worship

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

51 STF – Great is the faithfulness, O God my Father OR

338 STF – There is a Redeemer

Readings: Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42

Hymn:

436 STF – What shall I do my God to love, my loving God to praise? OR

556 STF – Just as I am, without one plea

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

663 STF – I, the Lord of sea and sky OR

776 STF – I In the Lord I'll be ever thankful

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

345 STF – And can it be that I should gain? OR

564 STF – O thou who camest from above

Blessing

Call to worship

Lord you call us to worship you,
Not for your benefit, but for ours.
As we sing, pray, praise and reflect today,
May we tune ourselves to your wisdom and grace, O Lord.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

372 STF – Come down, O Love divine OR
24 STF – Come, now is the time to worship

Opening Prayers

You could share these words (on a screen or print out) so people can join in with the ‘all’ section, or you could have two voices leading these prayers, with one being the ‘leader’ and the other ‘all’.

Leader: Loving God, we come before you to worship this morning, lifting our voices in song and praise.

All: Lord we lift our voices and sing your praises with deep joy in our hearts.

Leader: We also come together today feeling the weight of the week behind us, for ourselves and for others, both locally and across the globe. We call out for your presence.

All: Lord we lift our sorrows and fears towards the heavens, knowing that you share our burdens and that you hear our cries.

Leader: Lord we come before you today, each of us stitched together by the complexities of all it means to be human. May we remember that we are never alone and that, whatever has come before, can always begin again in love.

All: Lord, we join with you in love this day.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Lent, leading to Easter week, was a really busy time for Jesus! We truly see the entirety of Jesus' ministry starting, ending, and being picked up by the disciples that leads to the thousands of years of the Church that we know now! Jesus taught in two key ways: Practical Example and Parables. So lets hear about one of those parables!

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker ²

Opening prayers written by Hannah Baker

Picture the scene: Jesus is in the temple. There are crowds of people all around. Some are just going about their days. Some are teachers, their students, guards and holy people. There are people shouting loudly, teaching to all those around them if they listen or not! Some people even respond and try and debate with them!

Enter: Jesus.

Jesus starts debating with the teachers, the pharisees, about what they are saying about God.

After doing that, we hear him say this:

[Read Matthew 15: 10-20, in a version that you are comfortable with. Shown below is the Message version]

He then called the crowd together and said, “Listen, and take this to heart. It’s not what you swallow that pollutes your life, but what you vomit up.”

Later his disciples came and told him, “Did you know how upset the Pharisees were when they heard what you said?”

Jesus shrugged it off. “Every tree that wasn’t planted by my Father in heaven will be pulled up by its roots. Forget them. They are blind men leading blind men. When a blind man leads a blind man, they both end up in the ditch.”

Peter said, “I don’t get it. Put it in plain language.”

Jesus replied, “You, too? Are you being wilfully stupid? Don’t you know that anything that is swallowed works its way through the intestines and is finally defecated? But what comes out of the mouth gets its start in the heart. It’s from the heart that we vomit up evil arguments, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, lies, and cussing. That’s what pollutes. Eating or not eating certain foods, washing or not washing your hands—that’s neither here nor there.”

But what does Jesus mean here? At the time, people believed that eating certain food, such as bacon, made you an unclean person. If you were seen as an unclean person, you were not welcome around clean people. Yet! Jesus turns to everyone to say that avoiding eating the “unclean” food isn’t enough. In fact, you could eat the “clean” food and still do bad things. What Jesus points out is that who we are inside impacts what we do on the outside.

Or in another way: If we are rude to others, call them names, and don’t include them its not because we ate a burger from McDonalds! It’s because we are not being the loving people that God wants us to be.

Jesus wants us to be the good, loving people that God knows we can be. We know that we do bad things without meaning to; but Jesus says to us that our actions show who we are inside. If we upset someone by accident it says more that we go up to them and apologise to them than just ignore them. If someone is preventing them from joining in with us it says a lot more about those who find ways to include people than continue to exclude them.

Let us pray:

God,

help us to show to others through our words and actions your love that we know in our own hearts.

Amen.³

Hymn:

51 STF – Great is the faithfulness, O God my Father OR

338 STF – There is a Redeemer

Readings: Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42

Hymn:

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Reflections on the readings

In the recently released film, 'The Reluctant Convert' the story is told of the faith journey of CS Lewis from reluctant church goer, through atheism to a deep personal Christian faith. Along the way were many points of revelation and experience in which the young Lewis is challenged by circumstances and intellectual challenges, for example, – the death of his mother, the irrational behaviour of his bereaved father, his wartime experiences all served to make him question any concept of a loving God whilst his encounters with beauty, friendship and intellectual argument swayed him in the other direction. I recommend you watch the film!

So often we speak of conversion as if it is a once in lifetime moment of revelation. A pivotal moment with a 'before' and 'after' but I suspect for many, if not for all of us, any such moment has been preceded by many questions and challenges that we did not discern at the time. Like Lewis we are reluctant converts and our conversion has been a process and continues to be so. This is maybe why the story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman is one of my favourites.

The story of this encounter is one of many layers. On the surface we have a man with a thirst and no bucket, and a woman with a history and a bucket. Surely the author of John's gospel had a twinkle in their eye as they began to unfold this narrative. After all, if you were wanting to convince someone that Jesus was in fact the Saviour why would you start with him sitting down with a rather unacceptable woman – not only that but sharing a drinking vessel with a Samaritan.

But the encounter causes questions and layer by layer the questions lead to revelations, not just for Jesus but for the woman too. As the layers unpeel they begin to see each other with fresh eyes, and not with their eyes alone but with their inner being.

Of course, the whole of John's gospel is full of such signs that break open to reveal a new reality in the person of Jesus. Bread is seen to be embodiment, sight becomes insight, the shepherd is discovered to be the saviour, but maybe in this story more than any we see the humanity and divinity of Jesus embodied in an unlikely encounter at an historic well.

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Annan-Hood

In the film, 'The Reluctant Convert' Lewis finally finds faith for himself and at that moment is confronted with his own image in a mirror. His past has not only rejected Christianity but has dabbled in the occult, his wartime experiences have left him bruised both physically and emotionally and he sees someone reflected back at himself that he chooses not to be. It is quite clear that conversion is also confrontation, confrontation with the past and also a turning point for repentance and change.

If conversion is not a single moment then neither is repentance and, beyond the remit of the film, we know that Lewis had much to confront and change within his own personal story. The Samaritan woman too, although buoyed up by her understanding from the encounter with Jesus, had an unknown future with challenges too. We can speculate that she may well have been ridiculed or even spurned by those with whom she shared her euphoria.

Lent is a time for us to look into the mirror of our own lives and take a close look at who we are becoming. And this examination is not simply for us as individuals but for us as communities and societies too. If Jesus were to sit down and drink from our bucket what would be revealed about us and what might we want to change? When we look in the mirror, what do we see? What in us makes us reluctant converts?

God of truth and beauty

Look with compassion on this beautiful and broken world

Sit with us and share your wisdom,

Reveal to us what will not do

And change us, convert us and reform us

To reflect your kingdom

In Jesus name we pray

Amen.⁴

Hymn:

663 STF – I, the Lord of sea and sky OR

776 STF – I In the Lord I'll be ever thankful

Prayers of intercession

In the stillness of this moment, we come seeking peace

We find a comfortable sitting position

We close our eyes if that's helpful to us

Or we simply sit, taking in what's around us.

Our hands might be together, or gently clasped

We may hold the hand of another

Or let our hands sit, open, in our lap

We let time float on by, and spend this moment with you.

In your presence, we are free,

Free to share what's on our minds.

We are free to start unravelling all the knots in our minds and in our hearts

The people we worry about, coping with illness...bereavement...loneliness...anxiety...

⁴ Reflection written by Barbara Glasson

The situations in this world that fill us with anger, despair, a feeling of helplessness, or more questions than we can keep up with.

In the stillness of this moment, we let those thoughts unravel, and we share each of them with you:

We lay them at the foot of the cross, whether we have the words to express them or not:

You hear us

You know

You understand

You are here.

We take a moment in the silence to reflect, to share, to unload, to question and to wonder:

Silence

Loving Jesus, you take our confusing tangle of thoughts, worries and questions.

You take the feeling of overwhelm which can sometimes come with experiencing and witnessing so much sorrow, discomfort, conflict and need.

May we feel you taking a seat beside us

Sharing in the pain, sorrow and discomfort

Weeping and raging with us.

May we hear you whispering words of peace into our hearts

Gently reminding us not to give up hope

Encouraging us to get up when we are ready and continue on the journey

Urging us to be peacemakers, even when the task feels gargantuan

Enabling us to embody hope and peace in all the ways we can

Guiding us to sow seeds of love wherever we go

Calling us to trust that it is enough.

Lord Jesus, we pray,

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

God of all life,

Accept these gifts, those here in my hands, and all of us here in this room,

And may those of us who decide how they are used – treasurers, volunteers, church council members and people who are part of this community – put them to use for the building of grace and peace, here and elsewhere.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

345 STF – And can it be that I should gain? OR

564 STF – O thou who camest from above

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

Blessing

Take a breath, and look around you. As you head out into this week, you might not always be surrounded by other people who are with you on this journey – but today you are. That is one of the reasons we still gather to worship – to remind each other that we are disciples together.

Take the memory of this moment and these people with you into a world in need.

Amen.⁷

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker