



LENT 4A

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



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

59 STF – Lord, the light of your love is shining OR

17 STF – With gladness we worship, rejoice as we sing

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

370 STF – Breathe on me, Breath of God OR

88 STF – Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!

Readings: 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

Hymn:

437 STF – When the music fades, all is stripped away OR

465 STF – Guide me, O thou great Jehovah

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

545 STF – Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart OR

134 STF – Christ, whose glory fills the skies

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

440 STF – Amazing Grace – how sweet the sound OR

556 STF – Just as I am, without one plea

Blessing

The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

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Call to worship

This is the Lord's day,
And we open ourselves up to hear from you, Lord God.

As we pray and sing, listen and think, learn and reflect,
We invite you to come amongst us, by your grace,
And with your Spirit in our midst. Amen.¹

Hymn:

59 STF – Lord, the light of your love is shining OR
17 STF – With gladness we worship, rejoice as we sing

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 to worship this morning, eager to sit at your table and dwell in your house. We come seeking rest for our weary bones and balm for our weary hearts.

All: Thank you Lord for your goodness and love all the days of our lives.

Leader: We also come today knowing that it is through your love that we are welcome here and that all who rest here will find refreshment for their soul.

All: Thank you Lord for providing a place for us all to rest our heads and calm our hearts.

Leader: Even in our darkest valleys, may we know that we are never alone and that you walk with us every step of the way.

In your name,

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

[Preparation: Post-it notes and Flipchart paper, Pens].

We when think of Psalms, there is one that I think nearly everyone knows about; regardless of whether they have been in a church all their life, joined a worshipping community recently, or know nothing about the church at all! That Psalm is Psalm 23.

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Hannah Baker

Psalm 23 is used as the opening song to the Vicar of Dibley. It is read out in the movie "Titanic". Psalm 23 is used as an Easter egg in Bruce Almighty (the address where Bruce meets God is 77256 23rd Street, which when typed on a phone reads as Psalm 23rd Street). Psalm 23 has inspired the music from artists and bands such as U2, Pink Floyd, The Notorious B.I.G, and The Offspring! Psalm 23 is most often used in funerals but was even used as a prayer for the US, as read by George W Bush immediately after the 9/11 attacks.

The writer of the Psalm gives us the image of God being that of a shepherd. The shepherd, the loving, peaceful, caring one that provides and protects the sheep from all dangers. The type of shepherd that Jesus speaks of later in a parable that leaves the 99 sheep to find the one that went missing. It is a Psalm that assures us that we do not lack anything, that God is ever present with us; walking alongside us, guiding us, providing for us.

Let us remind ourselves of the words of Psalm 23:

(Read out Psalm 23, shown here below is from the Message version, but read in the translation you are most comfortable with)

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.

Even though I walk
 through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
 for you are with me; your rod and your staff,
 they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me
 in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil;
 my cup overflows.

Surely your goodness and love will follow me
 all the days of my life,
 and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

For our prayers today, and in the spirit of Psalm 23, there are two sheets here. We invite you to write on the post-its near you:

- Something you want to thank God for this past week, big or small
- Something you want God to be with you through this coming week

When you have done that, come as you feel called in this time of prayer to bring them forward and place them on these sheets.

[During this time of prayer, perhaps have songs playing that are different version of Psalm 23. When it feels appropriate, draw together everyone with this prayer:]

You God are our shepherd.

We lack nothing.

Your goodness and love will follow us and those around us all the days of our lives. May we be refreshed, and be guided by you.

Amen.³

Hymn:

370 STF – Breathe on me, Breath of God OR

88 STF – Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!

Readings: 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

Hymn:

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Reflections on the readings

“When you’re an underdog, you’re forced to try things you would never otherwise have attempted.” – Malcolm Gladwell

The huge crowd is still, and quiet. Those gathered there are filled with anticipation as the next Dragon Warrior is about to be chosen.

The silence is then dramatically broken by the crack of fireworks and a large panda landing unceremoniously from the sky right in the middle of the arena... and the crowd gasps.

Just in case you think I’ve lost my mind, let me quickly fill you in – that summary is of course taken from the 2008 Dreamworks animated classic movie: Kung Fu Panda. You may already be familiar with this consequential movie...?

This scene is the hilarious moment when Grand Master Oogway chooses our hero Po to be the next Dragon Warrior – safe to say somewhat against the odds – and it is an important role: this will be the next kung fu master who is allegedly capable of understanding the secret of the mystical Dragon Scroll and thereby unlocking the key to limitless power.

If you haven’t seen it – treat yourself – it’s great fun for all the family!

OK so maybe it’s not every day we hear a story of an unlikely panda being chosen to be a kung fu master (and spoiler alert... this is NOT a true story!!) but I wonder if you will indulge me a little and let me run with this thread today?

We have listened to all four of our lectionary readings today, and three of them tell us stories with a common theme.

In the reading from the 1 Samuel we hear of the moment that David is chosen to be the future king, and that he was the most unlikely and unexpected choice from the collection of

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Annan-Hood

Jesse's sons that had been assembled for the occasion. So unlikely was David as the potential successor he had not even been invited to join the line for the ceremony and had stayed working in the fields. Against all odds he was selected above all the other "way-more-likely" candidates. It would make for a powerful drama as we imagine the emotions and rivalry raging amongst all the protagonists. There would clearly have been much surprise at the unlikely choice of this young boy for this important role.

Not unlike a clumsy panda being chosen to save his people....?! It would seem this is a tale as old as time.

Psalm 23 brings us some of the most celebrated and well known words in the entire bible. Here are beautiful words of comfort written by – of all people – David (bravo to the lectionary compilers for continuity!). These words are often reprinted and spoken at tough times in people's lives, and it's not hard to work out why. This collection of verses is meant for all of us. WE are the subject of the assurance from God, WE can be comforted, guided, refreshed and inspired. WE are invited to lay down and rest. WE are each and every one of us important and WE matter. We are "worth it". We all have a place at this table.

Our gospel passage tells of a man who had been blind from birth who has a transformative encounter with Jesus. Whether the way in which he "receives his sight" is in reality physical or spiritual is way less important than the story of his transformation that we are invited into. Here a humble man lays himself open to the love of Jesus and to have his life changed in a serious way, and in turn this unlocks a number of opportunities for Jesus to craft his teachings to the people gathered.

So... what is the common theme in these three stories?

All of the unlikely subjects in these stories are "anointed".

There is a physical element to this which takes place either with oil or with mud in the case of the gospel, but we are told of a process where each of these people can be described as being involved in some sort of "anointing"

The definition of anointing is:

"chosen by or as if by divine authority; chosen for a sacred, high, or special vocation or purpose."

Chosen for a special purpose...?

In our comedy-fantasy introduction, Po was chosen for a special purpose. David was chosen by Samuel, for a special purpose. The blind man was chosen by Jesus, for a special purpose. And amazingly... we hear in the Psalm that through the vision of God's relationship with every single one of us... we are all anointed. We are "chosen for a special purpose".

So, this leaves us with a reasonably obvious question. What is this special purpose that we have ALL been selected for?

Now let's look at the other passage from the lectionary - the letter to the Ephesians. We are all invited to "live as children of light":

"for once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Walk as children of light"

I wonder if this is telling us that the "anointing" we experience in our lives is somehow wrapped up in the idea of light.

We are reminded every Christmas that Christ comes as the "light of the world".

Light is all around us, and as Christians we are led and inspired to believe that Christ is that light. The light of Christ shines in the faces of the people around us. We are bathed in light wherever we go and the love of Christ surrounds us in and through that light. Every

single lumen of the light we experience can be a reminder to us of our relationship with Christ and our place in the world.

Desmond Tutu tells us: "Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness."

We read in John's gospel:

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it". John 1:5, New International Version

So – does this help us to understand what our "special purpose" might be?

The irony of the story of Kung Fu Panda is that the great mission of the Dragon Master is the fact that they and they alone can understand the contents of the great mystical Dragon Scroll, and the people wait with bated breath to receive this truth. When Po actually holds the Dragon Scroll in his paw, he discovers the shocking truth. It is blank. The truth - as he discovers on his journey - is that the real truth lies right within himself.

The light and love of Christ is all around us, but we are only able to be transformed when we allow this light into our souls.

Leonard Cohen tells us in his stunning song: Anthem:

*Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in"*

We must allow ourselves to be real and vulnerable with each other to allow our cracks to be seen and acknowledged, and to let the light flow in.

We can be children of light

We are invited to be children of light

We are all chosen for a special purpose, and maybe this purpose is as simple as a call to "be who we are, where we are"

This is a universal purpose which can apply to each and every one of us. Can you truly allow yourself to "be".... To be "who you are", and "where you are" right now?

These words are simple, but they need work to bring them to fruition

To truly be who we are, we must be open, honest and vulnerable with each other and ourselves. To truly know where we are, and what we can do while we're there, takes bravery and courage to assess our lives and circumstances. We are all invited to take our place at the table where God welcomes us, loves us, and there "anoints" us.

So we find ourselves deep in another Lenten season, a season where we try to be courageous to look within ourselves, and dare to be vulnerable.

May we open our hearts and souls to the light of Christ and let that light flow through us, and change us.

May we know we have a special purpose for which we have been chosen

May we be "who we are, where we are."

In the light of Christ,

Amen.⁴

⁴ Reflection written by Kev Dobson

Hymn:

545 STF – Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart OR

134 STF – Christ, whose glory fills the skies

Prayers of intercession

In today's prayers you will hear some of the lyrics from the Katrina & the Waves' Eurovision-winning song "Love, Shine a Light"

Let us pray:

"Love, shine a light in every corner of my heart"

Lord God, We can feel so lost in a world that seems so much bigger than we are, and lament many of the horrible situations that prevail in our daily news bulletins.

We must not lose hope. There is light, despite the darkness.

Help us to let the light of Christ shine in us, wherever we go in the world.

"Light up the magic, in every little part"

Lord God, we can spend too much time lost and confused. Sometimes there seems no way forward in situations that are causing pain and torment.

We must not lose hope. There is light, despite the darkness.

Help us to seek the new ways to move forward, help us to innovate, help us to be brave as we try something new.

"Like the mighty river, flowing from the stream"

Lord God, help us to see your light and beauty in the world around us. Help us to appreciate the sheer joy of nature, and also the light – your light – which shines in the people around us.

We must not lose hope. There is light, despite the darkness.

Help us to see the light, to reflect the light, and to illuminate our beautiful world.

"We're all gonna shine a light together"

Lord God, help us to remember we are better together. We can be stronger in unity and strength than we can ever be alone. Help us to be open to hear and respect opposing views and work together to make the world in which we live a better place.

We must not lose hope. There is light, despite the darkness.

Help us to seek connections with others to achieve more with our time.

"Love shine a light

Love shine a light

Love shine a light."

In the name of Jesus, the source of light in the world, Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Kev Dobson

God of all grace,

May you be at work in our gift-giving, so that the financial gifts we have given today, and the gifts that each of us represent, can be used for the transformation of lives, hearts, our community and the whole cosmos.

Come, Lord Jesus,

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

440 STF – Amazing Grace – how sweet the sound OR

556 STF – Just as I am, without one plea

Blessing

We will go out with joy, and be sent forth with peace.

May the Spirit of God go with you, that you might be a person of peace to all who you meet this week.

May you know the light of love in your life,

And trust in Jesus every step of the way, Amen.⁷

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker