

twelvebaskets



ORDINARY 15A

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

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Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A
12th July 2026



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

123 STF – Come, you thankful people, come OR

156 STF – From the breaking of the dawn to the setting of the sun

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

101 STF – Before the world began, one Word was there OR

408 STF – How small a spark has lit a living fire!

Readings: Genesis 25: 19-34; Psalm 119: 105-112; Romans 8: 1-11; Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23

Hymn:

615 STF – Let love be real, in giving and receiving OR

668 STF – Teach me, my God and King

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

463 STF – Deep in the shadows of the past OR

454 STF – Where shall my wondering soul begin

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

412 STF – See how great a flame aspires OR

397 STF – The Spirit lives to set us free

Blessing

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Call to worship

This is the time to worship,
This is the time to bring our hearts to you,
This is the moment to encounter you again,
Come into our lives, and show us the way forward,
We pray.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

123 STF – Come, you thankful people, come OR

156 STF – From the breaking of the dawn to the setting of the sun

Opening Prayers

Creator God, we are here to offer worship to you this day. Still our hearts and minds as we come to you in prayer... *(a short pause may be held)*

As we pause to pay attention to your creation all around us, we lift our voices in worship, our minds in wonder, our hearts in love.

In this summer season, we offer praise for the many ways in which we know your Presence amongst us:

- we feel the warmth of the sun and recall you appearing to Moses in a burning bush and your coming at Pentecost as tongues of fire and we open our hearts to be strangely warmed once again
- we feel the refreshing of the rain and recall the river of life flowing from the temple in ancient times and your offer of living water to those who are thirsty, and we open our spirits to be refreshed one again
- we hear the breeze playing amidst the trees and recall you walking with Adam and Eve in the cool of the evening, and the wind of your Spirit which blows where it will and we open our minds for your renewing breath.

We remember that you are not a stranger to this world in which we live, for you lived here too and we offer praise and worship for the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus – at one with us and at one with you. Creator God.

As we notice the beauty and wonder of the world, so too we are aware that there is brokenness all around – pollution, waste, disease, famine, drought... and we lament all that is wrong in this world... *(pause)*

Turning our gaze upon ourselves, again we see contrasts – our hope, our love, our joy and our peace are too often marred by our despair, our hatred, our pain and our anxiety... *(pause)*

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

As we offer ourselves in worship today, so we ask for your forgiveness for all the ways in which we have added to the pain and brokenness of the world... *(pause)*

Thank you, gracious God, that you hear our prayer; you know us through and through and love us without limit. Thank you that you have promised to forgive our sins when we confess to you. With thankful hearts we receive your forgiveness now and turn our faces to the gaze of your love.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Prep: Either Flipchart Paper or Slides, showing a before and after of where the seeds landed and how they grew. I encourage you to be creative! If you can as well, maybe hand out seeds to people to take home.

We have heard many times before of how Jesus used to tell stories, or parables. These would be stories that had a deep meaning and some learning for everyone that heard it, but might need explaining to folks to really understand it properly.

The one we are going to hear about today is about a Sower, or a Farmer!

Farmers back when Jesus was around are much like the Farmers around today: They would plant seeds, grow crops, harvest them, then sell the harvest on to be made into food or clothing, or even to feed cattle! A farmer knows their field, does what they can to grow a good crop even though the weather, animals, and even people would be against them!

This Farmer that Jesus talks about is out one day and decides to scatter his seeds, or plant them, to grow crops. Farmers today would drill the field with machines and plant the seeds that way, but Farmers then would have to walk up and down the fields with bags of seed and grab a handful and scatter as they walked.

The Seeds fell on four places, according to Jesus:

1. Some fell on a path
2. Some fell on rocky places
3. Some fell among thorns
4. Some fell on good soil

What do we think happened to the seeds that fell on the path? (Ask for ideas before reveal) They became food for the birds!

How about the seed that fell on the rocky places? (Ask for ideas before reveal) There was some soil and the seed grew, but it couldn't find good roots! So, the first bit of sun that came burned up the plant, or the first bit of rain washed it away.

² Opening prayers written by Jill Baker

The third seed? The one that fell among thorns? (Ask for ideas before reveal) They grew, but because of the thorns and weeds it was planted amongst it meant that it didn't grow well and didn't produce a harvest.

And finally, the final seed? What happened to the seed that fell on good soil? (Ask for ideas before reveal) Not only did it grow and bear fruit, but Jesus said it produced much more than what was sown, around 100 times more!

But! I can see that you might be like those that heard Jesus say this parable in the first place: Jesus, that's all well and good...but I'm not a seed! What does this mean?!

(Taken from the Message Version but use a version that you are comfortable with!)

"Study this story of the farmer planting seed. When anyone hears news of the kingdom and doesn't take it in, it just remains on the surface, and so the Evil One comes along and plucks it right out of that person's heart. This is the seed the farmer scatters on the road.

"The seed cast in the gravel—this is the person who hears and instantly responds with enthusiasm. But there is no soil of character, and so when the emotions wear off and some difficulty arrives, there is nothing to show for it.

"The seed cast in the weeds is the person who hears the kingdom news, but weeds of worry and illusions about getting more and wanting everything under the sun strangle what was heard, and nothing comes of it.

"The seed cast on good earth is the person who hears and takes in the News and then produces a harvest beyond his wildest dreams."

Which kind of seed are we in that parable? Or more to the point which seed do we want to be?

(If you plan to hand out seeds to people, ask them to hold those seeds in their hands for the prayer)

God, Creator and Cultivator, may we be the seeds that are planted in good soil, where our harvest is shared abundantly with others.

Amen.³

Hymn:

101 STF – Before the world began, one Word was there OR

408 STF – How small a spark has lit a living fire!

Readings: Genesis 25:19-34; Psalm 119:105-112; Romans 8:1-11; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Hymn:

615 STF – Let love be real, in giving and receiving OR

668 STF – Teach me, my God and King

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Annan-Hood

Reflections on the readings

“Comfort the afflicted... and afflict the comfortable” – Finley Peter Dunne

The origin of this quote is in a fictional satirical work written by the American author Finley Peter Dunne in 1902. It was part of a commentary on how the author saw the role of newspapers at the time. It has since been adopted as something of a motto or mantra in journalistic circles, promoting the idea that the press would be there to support the underprivileged in society whilst at the same time challenging those in power.

The first time I heard the phrase was in a rather different context. It was when I was studying to be a Local Preacher and in the training material this phrase was proposed as a guide for a good sermon. The suggestion was that the trainee might think about delivering the material within their sermon in such a way that could offer an appropriate challenge from the word of God in areas of people's lives that may require it, and also to be able to offer the comfort of the Gospel to those who were struggling. Perhaps the perfect sermon may do both at the same time. The phrase has stayed with me ever since.

I like it. When we wrestle with God's word it is good and right that we are challenged, but all the time we should know and be reminded that the good news we share is just that... good.

When it comes to challenging ourselves, I am all for that challenge being tough and hard-hitting, but I do worry sometimes it can be inappropriately applied. The image of angry preachers scaring the living daylights out of unsuspecting congregants is all too real sometimes. I've seen examples of preaching particularly in the US which is genuinely unsavoury, unhelpful and damaging.

We all have a responsibility to be careful when we share God's word between us.

A question for you all to ponder...

- Can you think of times when you or anyone you know have been left feeling guilty or hurt in church encounters, or left feeling ashamed of who you/they are?

(Leave time for folks to think or invite feedback)

I have another (more light-hearted!) question for you:

- Why is the number 5,126 significant in relation to a vacuum cleaner?

(Leave time to gather answers or thoughts)

This was the number of functioning prototypes James Dyson built of his bagless vacuum cleaner that did not succeed in doing the job adequately. He did this over a period of five years working often in his garden shed.

This went on until he finally built the one that did work correctly. The rest, as they say, is history.

I wonder, how many of us would have made it all the way to number 5,127?

I think I might have had enough at 50.

Imagine getting to failure number 1000 and thinking... I'll just give it a few more tries...?

Over 5000 attempts??

I am genuinely not sure I have what it takes to battle through that much failure and disappointment, only to pick myself up and try again, and again...

Aside from being quite in awe at his achievement, the other effect this has on me is just to make me feel guilty and ashamed of my own inadequacy.

Our lectionary reading from Matthew's gospel today offers us the Parable of the Sower. This is one of the more famous parables – often used in Sunday Schools because of its relative simplicity, and over the years I have heard a few different sermons on the story.

There is a typical reaction that I get inside when I have listened to these sermons – I feel guilty, and more than a little inadequate. This happens because the telling of the story usually challenges two aspects of my personality which I feel can be weak.

Firstly, the story asks me how good is my evangelism?

I'm certainly not the best evangelist in town. I have some views about the effectiveness of traditional evangelism that have got me into trouble over the years. I often think this is because I spent the first 35 years of my life as an active atheist and I never responded well to anyone forcing the gospel upon me. In the end my conversion was brought about with so much more grace and subtlety than that, which has resulted in my position on the subject.

But nevertheless the story usually changes me and makes me wonder if I've got it right. Especially when the guy at the front is telling me I'm wrong...

The second thing the story does for me is ask me how good is my receptiveness to God's word. Is my soil "barren" and am I weak in my responses?

I have often been left feeling guilty by hearing sermons on this story.

Some of the other gospel stories can have the same effect, if they are retold and sermonised in a less than compassionate way.

The barren fig tree parable can simply challenge our skill in bearing fruit, the ten bridesmaids can leave us feeling like we're just never well enough prepared, and as for the sheep and the goats... How many of us leave a service thinking we're stuck in the wrong queue???

I often wonder if there is not a richer truth than that behind many of these stories, and today's story about the Sower is one such example.

What if the point of this story is not us and our relationship with the seed, but is instead God and the way in which God sows that seed?

Here we have a God that offers himself to people and we hear of the many ways in which that offer is simply ignored, or the point is missed or just misunderstood, but then every now and then someone gets it, and a beautiful connection is made.

This God is not keeping score.

This God does not amend the goodness of the next offer relative to the success or otherwise of the previous attempts.

Rather like the way we understand James Dyson's approach in human terms, this God is simply not deterred by failure.

This is a God who will keep sowing seeds, regardless of where they land or whether they germinate. This God will never give up trying. This God will never take a break, the offer is always there. This God is a god who showers his grace upon all of us, unconditionally, and unsparingly.

Here we find the good news in this story for all of us.

Regardless of any of our own inadequacies, and also without any kind of rank or grading, God's beautiful ridiculous, irrational grace and love is there for us all, whenever we want it, or need it.

We need never be ashamed of who we are, or how “good” we are... we are all equally eligible.

Through the beauty of the fellowship and love we share with one another, God’s grace comes alive in our lives, inspiring us to move forward with Christ deep in our hearts and souls.

The psalmist is extravagant in their description of this show of love from God:

- “your wagon tracks overflow with richness”
- “the pastures of the wilderness overflow”
- “the hills gird themselves with joy”

So – just for today, let us choose this telling of this story.

Just for today, let us leave our guilt and shame at the door.

Whilst all the time recognising and accepting that we are of course “afflicted”... just for today, let us be “comforted”

Amen.⁴

Hymn:

463 STF – Deep in the shadows of the past OR

454 STF – Where shall my wondering soul begin

Prayers of intercession

Please read each short verse before each section of prayer, leaving silence between prayers as appropriate:

“As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” — Psalm 103:12

God of grace,

We lift before you those of us who are weighed down by the memory of the past. For every heart replaying old failures, for every mind trapped in regret, we ask for the liberating power of your grace. Remind us that in Christ, the record of wrongs has been nailed to the cross and cancelled forever. Replace the voice of accusation with the voice of your Spirit, declaring us forgiven, cleansed, and free. May we walk in the light of your mercy, unashamed and unafraid. Amen.

“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” — Romans 8:1

God of grace,

We intercede for all who cannot forgive themselves, who live under the shadow of self-condemnation. Silence the lies that tell us we are unworthy of love. Let your truth rise within us—that we are accepted, chosen, and beloved in you. Heal the wounds of shame with the balm of your compassion. Teach us to see ourselves through your eyes, clothed in righteousness, radiant with hope. Amen.

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” — Romans 15:7

⁴ Reflection written by Kevin Dobson

God of grace,

We pray for your Church to be a refuge for the broken, not a courtroom of judgment. May our words and actions reflect the grace we have received. Help us to welcome the wounded, to listen without condemnation, and to speak life into those crushed by guilt. Let our fellowship be a living testimony that your mercy triumphs over judgment. Amen.

“Those who look to Him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.” — Psalm 34:5

God of grace,

We bring before you those of us who hiding in the shadows of shame. Give us courage to lift our eyes to you, to believe that your love is stronger than our fear. Break the chains that keep us silent and isolated. Let us experience the joy of being fully known and fully loved. May our story become a testimony of your redeeming grace. Amen.

“If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” — 2 Corinthians 5:17

God of grace,

We intercede for all of us who have forgotten who we are in you. Wash away the labels of failure, sinner, and unworthy, and replace them with your truth: forgiven, child of God, heir of the kingdom. Let us live from a place of grace, not guilt; from acceptance, not striving. May our lives shine with the freedom of those who know they are loved beyond measure.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Holy God,

You are a generous and loving God, and we give thanks for your generosity to us, this day. Take these gifts, O God, and use them in to help us build your kingdom, here on earth – a kingdom of justice, joy and peace, where all can know they are loved.

We bring this, and all our prayers, in Jesus' name.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

412 STF – See how great a flame aspires OR

397 STF – The Spirit lives to set us free

Blessing

If you need to be comforted this week, may you find the Spirit of God to hold you.

If you need to be encouraged, inspired and challenged, then may you hear the words of the Christ inviting you to be uncomfortable, in the service of the Kingdom.

May you know the Creator God close by, accepting you, just as you are, we pray

Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Kevin Dobson

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker