

# twelvebaskets



## ORDINARY 17A

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

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**Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A**  
26th July 2026



## Order of Service

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Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**68 STF – Worship God with the morning sunrise OR**

**650 STF – Heal us, Immanuel! Hear our prayer**

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**610 STF – Best of all is God is with us OR**

**132 STF – O God, our help in ages past**

Readings: Genesis 29: 15-28; Psalm 105: 1-11, 45b; Romans 8: 26-39; Matthew 13: 31-33, 44-52

**Hymn:**

**584 STF – Food to pilgrims given OR**

**255 STF – The kingdom of God is justice and joy**

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**654 STF – The love of God comes close where stands an open door OR**

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

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

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

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

Blessing

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The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

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## Call to worship

Here we come, to gather in Jesus' name,  
Come, Lord Jesus, by your Spirit.  
Here we come, to worship, pray, listen and reflect.  
Come, Lord Jesus, by your Spirit.  
Here we come, to be inspired and reminded of what is ours to do.  
Come, Lord Jesus, by your Spirit we pray,

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## Hymn:

68 STF – Worship God with the morning sunrise OR

650 STF – Heal us, Immanuel! Hear our prayer

## Opening Prayers

Living God, you are the source of all that is good, all that is worthy, all that is beautiful, and we have come to worship and adore you today for who you are.

- In a world which so often offers what is fake, you are the Truth, the ground of our being, the rock of our lives. We worship you and turn with relief from all that is false to focus afresh on your Presence here with us.
- In a world which so often seems futile, you are the Way, the purpose of our existence, the meaning of everything. We worship you and turn with hope from all that distracts to focus afresh on your call to follow.
- In a world which so often rewards selfishness, in Christ you have demonstrated sacrificial love and self-emptying grace. We worship you and turn with joy from our own concerns to gaze again at the cross and see your love, stretched out there for each of us.
- In a world which so often seems empty, you are the Life, the resurrection life of new beginnings, new hope, victory over evil. We worship you and turn with thanks from the passing pleasures of this world to your eternal life,

Yet, in wonder we sense that even our concerns matter to you. You who designed and created each of us are still interested in our lives –in Christ you were willing to become enmeshed in fake news and futility, to live amongst people of self-interest and vanity. You demonstrate how we can face up to the world as it is, just as in your power, we can face up to ourselves as we are...

Sometimes we are not as we want to be... sometimes we let you down, sometimes we let each other down, sometimes we let ourselves down... you know that, Gracious God, and yet you do not turn away.

As we look back over the last few days, or weeks, we recall words and actions of which we are ashamed... sentiments and opinions which were all about us... choices and decisions

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

which denied your power in our lives.... We are sorry... *(a few moments of silence may be kept)*.

Thank you, God of new beginnings, that you are always more ready to forgive than we are to confess; thank you that even now, in this moment, in this place, you come to each one of us, you place your hand on our shoulder, look us in the eye and say 'My child, you are forgiven, go in peace'.

So we receive your forgiveness and sense that we are changed, renewed, re-energised, to live and work for you.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

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

### **All Age Talk**

Prep: You'll need to prepare a simple frame and lattice, alongside having strips of paper or fabrics with pens that can write on them, and some tape. The idea of this is for the lattice to be tight enough to stay firm and allow fabric/paper to be looped into the weave.

It's the start of the summer holidays! Huzzah! I have no doubt that a lot of you are excited or have plans for the summer? Or are glad to be done with school until September? Quickly, who has one thing they are happy to be over with now school is done, and one thing that you are excited to do this summer?

*(After an appropriate amount of time and hearing back from folks)*

It is in the moments like these that we have a chance to stop, reflect, appreciate what has happened, to see what worries us, and to look ahead to what comes next. We do this at Christmas, at New Year, at Easter. For some of us we're finishing one school and are about to start big school, others are getting ready for university, apprenticeships or work. For a few of us we might be glad of a break and time to breathe! Others might be anxious about leaving consistency behind for a summer of uncertainty.

However: We are a church. God never wants us to do all these things alone, and Jesus talked many times about sharing with one another the bad and the good; because we are here to support one another, to celebrate with one another, to dream with one another.

You'll see at the front a frame. It's a weaving together of materials to make a lattice. There are pens and paper/fabric here. For our prayer, let's bring the moments of joy, the things we are anxious about, the things we are looking forward to, and the people on our hearts in all of this.

*(Invite folks forward to add their prayers, their connections to the weave. When most have done this, wrap it all up in prayer)*

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

God who weaves all our lives together. Take these strands of dreams, anxieties, names, and moments of joy and hold them, stitch them together, and may we be a community that is a tapestry that reflects your kingdom to the world around us.

Amen.<sup>3</sup>

**Hymn:**

610 STF – Best of all is God is with us OR

132 STF – O God, our help in ages past

**Readings:** Genesis 29: 15-28; Psalm 105: 1-11, 45b; Romans 8: 26-39; Matthew 13: 31-33, 44-52

**Hymn:**

584 STF – Food to pilgrims given OR

255 STF – The kingdom of God is justice and joy

**Reflections on the readings**

There is something unsettling about beginning with Jacob. The patriarch who will become Israel - ancestor of a people, bearer of covenant - here is a man being deceived, manipulated, exploited. He works seven years for the woman he loves, only to be given her sister instead on his wedding night. The tenderness of verse 20 - "they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her" - makes what follows all the more brutal. He wakes up married to Leah.

We might notice, too, that neither Rachel nor Leah is consulted. Laban trades in daughters as he trades in livestock. Power is exercised through deception. People are used as pawns in someone else's game. Relationships - what should be the deepest, most honest bonds between human beings - are instead instruments of control.

It is hard to read this story without thinking of the political world we inhabit. Right now we are experiencing profound polarisation - politics conducted through grievance and scapegoating, people reduced to categories or labels, public discourse that thrives on division and treats people we disagree with not as neighbours to be engaged but enemies to be destroyed. Laban's world is not so far away. The instinct to manipulate, to exploit, to treat people as means to an end rather than as image-bearers of God - that instinct is alive and well, and it is shaping our common life in ways that should concern us deeply.

This is not comfortable ground. But it is honest ground. The Bible does not sanitise the world into which God comes.

And yet - the Psalmist calls us to remember. "Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he has uttered" (Psalm 105:5). This is not a naive remembering that erases suffering or papers over injustice with easy optimism, but a faithful one that holds the covenant - God's unbreakable promise - alongside the full weight of human systemic brokenness. In a polarised age, this act of remembering is itself

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<sup>3</sup> All Age Talk written by Tim Annan-Hood

a political act. To recall that God's covenant is not tribal - that it was made not with one party or faction but with a people called to be a blessing to all nations - is to push back against politics that claims God exclusively for one side.

It is into this same tension that Paul writes, in Romans 8, one of the most extraordinary passages in scripture. He doesn't begin by saying everything is fine. He begins by acknowledging that we "do not know how to pray as we ought" - that sometimes the only prayer available to us is a groan too deep for words (v.26). He writes to communities who know hardship, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword. These are not abstractions. They are the lived realities of real people - and in our own time, they are the realities that polarised politics consistently fails to address, because division is easier to generate than solutions, and outrage is a better tool for winning elections than truth.

And then: "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Not despite these things. Not after they are resolved. In the middle of them. Because nothing - no power, no principality, no algorithm, no political programme, no culture war - can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. That love is not the property of any party. It cannot be weaponised. It holds left and right, remain and leave, progressive and conservative in the same unbreakable embrace. And that, in itself, is a radical political claim.

This is the ground from which the mustard seed grows.

Turn to Matthew 13 and we find Jesus reaching for images of hiddenness and transformation. The Kingdom of Heaven is not an empire that arrives with fanfare and force. It is a mustard seed - one of the smallest of seeds - that becomes a tree large enough for birds to nest in. It is yeast worked silently into flour until the whole batch is leavened. It is treasure hidden in a field. A pearl of extraordinary value, worth selling everything for.

In an age of political noise, these parables invite us to attend to what is quiet, hidden, and transforming. Back in May - in what feels, in retrospect, like a very parable-shaped moment - Baptist, Methodist and URC churches joined hundreds of charities and community groups for A Million Acts of Hope, a week of action deliberately designed to counter the narrative that division is all there is. "News reports and social media feeds can often make it feel like the UK is more divided than ever," wrote the Methodist Church in their invitation to get involved. "The voices of those who spread hate and seek to divide communities can seem loud, but they ignore the millions of actions which spread hope and kindness every day."

This is mustard seed logic. The acts being celebrated - a warm space, a community meal, a foodbank, a toddler group, a welcome for a refugee family - are not, individually, the stuff of headlines. They do not trend. They do not go viral. And yet, as the URC's Head of Public Issues Roo Stewart put it, they are how the church "lets its light shine before others" without hiding it under a basket. They are the yeast in the flour. They are the hidden treasure.

But A Million Acts of Hope also points to something more explicitly political. The Baptist Union's Steve Tinning, writing as part of the JPIT team, named it plainly: "At a time when much of our public conversation can feel polarised or fragile, this campaign offers something simple and powerful: a chance to notice, name and share the good that is already happening all around us." The campaign, he noted, is "intentionally non-partisan and invitational" - its goal is not to win an argument but to change the atmosphere. To demonstrate, through visible, relational, community-rooted action, that there is more that connects us than divides us.

This is not naive. It does not ignore that real injustices require real structural challenge - that sometimes the prophetic word is "no", that love without justice is sentiment. But it does insist that the form of our politics matters as much as its content. How we engage is itself a witness. Through JPIT's Constituency Action Network, churches across Britain are building meaningful, ongoing relationships with their MPs - not to lobby in the transactional sense, but to build the kind of trust that makes honest conversation about hard things possible. Relationship before polarisation. Encounter before strategy. Personhood before tribe.

This is the hidden seam of disciples working quietly for a kinder, truer politics. People who sit across the table from those they disagree with and choose to stay there. Who door-knock not to canvass but to listen. Who bring the tools of community organising and pastoral care into the public square. Who refuse to sort the world into enemies and allies, and insist instead on the more demanding, more hopeful work of encounter.

This is the yeast in the flour. It does not look like power. It will not trend on social media. But it is working - invisibly, relationally, persistently - transforming the whole batch. The mustard seed of a conversation between people who would never normally meet. The hidden treasure of a faith community that models genuine disagreement held within genuine love. The pearl of a politics that begins not with the question "how do we win?" but "how do we live well together?"

These things are worth everything. And in a world cracked open by division, they may matter more than we know.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it."

What are we willing to give up? For JPIT, this becomes a practical question as much as a spiritual one. The pearl might be a world where political debate is conducted with honesty and care for the most vulnerable. Where those fleeing persecution find welcome rather than a culture war. Where the complex, slow, relational work of building community across difference is valued over the quick hit of outrage. Is that worth everything?

I believe it is. The Spirit groans with us when we don't have words. And nothing can separate us from the love that makes it so.

## Questions for Reflection

1. Where do you see 'mustard seed' moments in your own community - quiet, relational, hidden acts that might be working a transformation in our common life?
2. Paul says the Spirit intercedes for us 'with sighs too deep for words.' How does this speak to us when the political climate makes prayer feel futile or inadequate?
3. The Genesis reading shows power exercised through deception and the use of people as pawns. Where do you see this pattern in public life today - and what does God's faithfulness (Psalm 105) mean in response?
4. What would it look like for your church community to model a politics built on relationship rather than polarisation?
5. How might you personally 'work the yeast' of a kinder, truer politics in your neighbourhood, workplace, or online spaces this week?<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Reflection written by Alex Clare-Young from the Joint Public Issues Team

## **Hymn:**

654 STF – The love of God comes close where stands an open door OR

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

## **Prayers of intercession**

God of our hearts,  
Come into our feelings, our emotions, teaching us the art of love.

Show us how to embrace your world and your people, with arms of grace.  
Guide us in each moment, that the very impulses of our bodies might be tuned to you.

God of love, enter our hearts,  
And tune your world to love.

God of our minds,  
Come into our thoughts, our intellects, and help us to focus the work of our brains on you.  
Show us how to be agents of love in the workplace, at school, in our reading, our writing,  
our thinking.

Guide us to come to know you more, through the power you have given us in our minds.

God of love, enter our hearts,  
And tune your world to love.

God of our families,  
Come into the places we call home, that we might show and discover something about you  
in our houses, at our mealtimes, in our beds.

Show us how to love each other, and reveal your nature of love to us, through our  
relationships with those closest to us – our family and closest friends.

Guide us in the difficulties and struggles that come with our family lives, and the suffering  
of those closest to us – bring them your love.

God of love, enter our hearts,  
And tune your world to love.

God of the Church,  
Come into the midst of your people, come to bring healing, to bring unity, to build a  
movement that can shape the world for good.

Show us how to love each other, to heal broken rifts within churches and between  
denominations. How to reach out into the world around us, bringing peace, not division,  
bringing love, and not conflict.

Guide us in our decision making and our worship, our committees and young church, our  
church councils and prayer meetings, bring the church closer to your design, your hopes  
for humanity.

We pray for the circuit, for all those looking for a fresh start. Lord, bring your newness,  
your refreshing and re-charging love. We pray for this church, as your people here begin  
afresh their journey with you.

God of love, enter our hearts,  
And tune your world to love.

God of the world,  
Come into your suffering, unequal planet, bringing peace and harmony where there is war

and discord.

Show your love to those who cannot see it this day, those tied up in war and conflict, battling with the HIV/AIDS epidemic, those struggling with a life of poverty.

God of love, enter our hearts,  
And tune your world to love.

God of our hearts - help us to be agents of love across your world, in the way we live our lives, in the people we meet and the situations we hold influence.

Amen.<sup>5</sup>

### **We will now take up the offering.**

Thank you, gift-giving God, for all that we have received. We come to you in gratitude today, giving thanks for all the many blessings we have in our lives.

As we make a gift to you, today, may these donations and all the work of our hands help to bring peace.

Amen.<sup>6</sup>

### **Hymn:**

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

254 STF – Seek ye first the kingdom of God

### **Blessing**

Go out, with the Spirit of God going ahead of you.

Go from this moment, knowing that there is a bigger story of love, which you can play a part in.

Go from this time, blessed, loved, inspired,  
In Jesus' name.

Amen.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

<sup>6</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker

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