



ORDINARY 18A

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



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

443 STF – Come, let us sing of a wonderful love OR

461 STF – Come, O thou Traveller unknown

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

72 STF – Father God, I wonder how I managed to exist OR

706 STF – Longing for light, we wait in darkness

Readings: Genesis 32:22-31; Psalm 17:1-7, 15; Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 14:13-21

Hymn:

390 STF – My God! I know, I feel thee mine OR

583 STF – Eat this bread, drink this cup

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

632 STF – I've had questions without answers OR

628 STF – Faithful One, so unchanging

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

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

636 STF – O love that wilt not let me go

Blessing

The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

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Call to worship

Open our hearts to receive you, O Lord.

Open our minds to learn from you, we pray.

Open our hands to do your work and follow in your mission.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

443 STF – Come, let us sing of a wonderful love OR

461 STF – Come, O thou Traveller unknown

Opening Prayers

Throughout this month, The Vine's opening prayers come to us from All We Can, as part of joining with them in a commitment to pray, act and respond to the conflict in Palestine/Israel, and include an invitation to support their Middle East Justice Appeal.

Let us pray.

In your humanity, incarnate God, you walked this earth.

You were promised through the prophets as the wonderful counselor, the prince of peace.

The footprint of your reign is embedded in the land of Palestine.

Bring now, we wholeheartedly pray, your wisdom and your peace into the world.

That our world may not be ruled by war, injustice and hatred but by peace-loving wisdom that offers everyone life in all its fullness.

Today we give thanks for the work of All We Can's humanitarian partner in the region, Jerusalem Princess Basma Centre, working to provide access to healthcare for Palestinian children affected by disabilities. Thanks to support for All We Can and the Methodist Church's Middle East appeal, 563 items of play equipment have already been provided and they are supporting an average of 90 children every week.

Even as we gather to worship, we give thanks for the valiant efforts of those living in much more challenging circumstances, who seek to do the work of justice and peace.

Help us to be inspired to make a change in our own communities, and in all places of conflict and division, this and every day,

O God.

Amen.²

To find out more and make a donation on behalf of your church – you could visit allwecan.org.uk/appeals/middleeast

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by All We Can

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

What's it like to be in a big crowd of people? Can you think of a time when you were in a large gathering with others – where was that? Maybe at a sports event, or a concert? Or how about a parade, a protest or public occasion? Tell the person next to you all about it... *(give this conversation a few minutes and take some feedback if time allows where people can share).*

We probably each have different thoughts and feelings about what it's like to be in a crowd. If there's a celebratory mood and everyone is jubilant it might feel joyous! Or if it's an occasion like Remembrance Sunday the atmosphere might be more solemn.

In today's gospel passage Jesus and the disciples have a difference of opinion – which (let's be honest!) isn't unusual! When the disciples see the big crowds which have gathered they want to send them away. But Jesus, the bible tells us, had compassion on them and wants to help.

And so he turns five loaves and two fishes into a meal where everyone is satisfied and has enough to eat, so much so that there's food leftover! The important moment in all of this is when Jesus looks to heaven and blesses the food. Jesus doesn't put an order in for a supermarket delivery or even ask everyone to share what they have – he simply provides. But not in his own strength and power but with God's. Together a simple meal is provided.

Jesus knows that our physical bodies matter as much as our minds, hearts and spirits. And he wants to take care of those too. He cares about our whole being, so there's a reminder here to be on the lookout for ways we too can be caring and supportive of others, from putting a meal on a table, to getting to a doctor's appointment, to letting someone know they matter and are loved abundantly by God. God made us and every part of us matters.³

Hymn:

72 STF – Father God, I wonder how I managed to exist OR

706 STF – Longing for light, we wait in darkness

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Hymn:

390 STF – My God! I know, I feel thee mine OR

583 STF – Eat this bread, drink this cup

³ All Age Talk written by Gail Adcock

Reflections on the readings

There is something deeply human that runs through all three of today's readings: each tells the story of people who refuse to let go.

Jacob refuses to let go of the mysterious stranger with whom he wrestles through the night. Paul refuses to let go of his love for his own people, even though that love causes him deep sorrow. The crowds refuse to let go of Jesus, following him into a deserted place because they long for hope, healing and meaning.

Three stories. Three struggles. Three reminders that faith is rarely neat.

Jacob's story is perhaps the strangest. He spends the night wrestling with someone, or something. The text leaves it deliberately mysterious. Is it an angel? Is it God? Is it his own conscience? Is it all three?

By morning he walks away with two things: a blessing and a limp.

Many of us grow up imagining that faith should remove our struggles. Yet the Bible seems to suggest something different. Often our deepest encounters with God happen not when everything is settled, but when life feels uncertain.

Jacob isn't praised because he understands everything, rather he is blessed because he stays in the struggle: "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

Many of us know something about that kind of wrestling.

- Questions about faith.
- Questions about loss.
- Questions about justice.
- Questions about who we are becoming.

Perhaps the invitation isn't always to find quick answers, but to keep wrestling honestly, because God seems remarkably willing to meet us there.

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, offers another kind of wrestling: his heart is breaking. He loves his own people and he longs for them to know the hope he has found in Christ. His words are raw, emotional and vulnerable. Paul reminds us that faith is never simply about being right, but it is always about loving people.

Sometimes Christians have become known for certainty before compassion, but Paul reverses that: he begins not with doctrine but with heartbreak.

Can we find ways to care more than we judge? Can we hold people before God without assuming we know everything about God's work in their lives? Can we let love win?

Then we come to one of Jesus' most famous miracles: five loaves, two fish and thousands of hungry people.

It is easy to become caught up in asking exactly how the miracle happened, but perhaps Matthew wants us to notice something else first: Jesus sees the crowd, he has compassion for them, he listens to and understands something of their plight.

Before there is bread, there is compassion. Before there is abundance, there is seeing.

So often we imagine scarcity defines our world:

- Not enough money.
- Not enough time.
- Not enough energy.
- Not enough hope.

The disciples look at what they don't have, but Jesus begins with what they do have. They may only have five loaves and two fish, but there is also a willingness to offer them. The miracle begins not with abundance but with generosity.

Perhaps this story asks us what happens when ordinary people place ordinary gifts into God's hands: a little kindness, a listening ear, a shared meal, an act of welcome.

None of these seems enough on its own, yet somehow God's kingdom has always grown through people who were willing to offer what little they had.

And there is one final detail that often gets overlooked: Jesus tells everyone to sit down together. In this miraculous meal there is no hierarchy, no priority queue, no distinction between worthy and unworthy. Everyone is fed, together, as equals.

In a world divided by wealth and poverty, politics, nationality, racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, transphobia, sexuality, we need images like this.

The kingdom Jesus imagines is one where there is enough because everyone belongs at the table. Perhaps that is still the miracle God invites us to help create: not only multiplying bread, but multiplying welcome, multiplying dignity, multiplying hope.

Jacob limps into a new future, Paul carries a heart that refuses to stop loving, Jesus feeds people before they have earned anything.

All three stories remind us that God's grace is found not in perfection, but in persistence, compassion and generosity.

May we have the courage to wrestle honestly, to love deeply, and to share whatever we have.

For God's kingdom has always begun with ordinary people willing to place ordinary gifts into extraordinary hands.

Amen.

Questions for Reflection

- Where in your own life are you wrestling with God, yourself or the world, and what might it mean to stay in that struggle rather than rush to easy answers?
- What gifts, however small they may seem, could you place into God's hands this week for the good of someone else?
- How can our church become more like the crowd gathered around Jesus' table, a place where everyone is welcomed, valued and fed?⁴

Hymn:

632 STF – I've had questions without answers OR

628 STF – Faithful One, so unchanging

Prayers of intercession

Let us pray.

Loving God,

You meet us in quiet places and crowded places,

⁴ Reflection written by Tim Baker

in moments of certainty and in nights of wrestling.
Hear our prayers as we bring before you the needs of your world.

[Pause]

God of compassion,
we pray for your Church throughout the world.
Where Christians are divided, bring understanding.
Where churches have become fearful, renew hope.
Where communities seek to welcome all people, strengthen and encourage them.

Help us to be known not for having all the answers,
but for reflecting your love,
your justice,
and your generous welcome.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

God of justice,
we pray for our world.

We remember places torn apart by war,
communities living with poverty,
people forced from their homes,
and all whose lives are shaped by fear or uncertainty.

Guide those who hold power.
Strengthen those who work for peace.
Comfort those who grieve.
Help us never to look away from the suffering of others,
but to become part of your work of healing.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

God of abundance,
we remember all who struggle to meet the basic needs of life.

We pray for those who rely on food banks,
those worried about rising costs,
those without secure housing,
and all who feel there is never enough.

May we be generous with what we have,
careful with what we consume,
and willing to share so that others may flourish.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

God who walks beside us,
we pray for those carrying burdens that few people see.

For those living with illness, anxiety, loneliness, bereavement, or difficult decisions.

For those whose faith feels uncertain.

For those wrestling through long nights.

Give them courage, companionship, and signs of your presence.

We hold before you now all those known personally to us...

[Pause]

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

God of hope,
bless this church and this community.

Help us to become people who notice those others overlook,
who welcome those who feel excluded,
who share generously,
and who trust that even our smallest gifts can become part of your kingdom.

We offer these prayers
in the name of Jesus Christ,
who feeds the hungry,
walks beside the weary,
and calls us all to his table.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

God of all grace,
We give thanks for your grace in our own lives,
The presence of your generosity and the blessings which we have received.
Come, Lord God, and show us how to follow in you footsteps, we pray.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

255 STF – The kingdom of God is justice and joy OR
636 STF – O love that wilt not let me go

Blessing

Loving God,
We are surrounded by your love,
Help us to notice, help us to see you at work,
And help us to follow in your way, we pray.

Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker