



ORDINARY 21A

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



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

552 STF – Here am I, Lord OR

463 STF – Deep in the shadows of the past OR

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

691 STF – What shall our greeting be: sign or our unity? OR

116 STF – Sing for God's glory that colours the dawn of creation

Readings: Exodus 1:8 – 2:10; Psalm 124:1-8; Romans 12:1-8; Matthew 16:13-20

Hymn:

331 STF – King of kings, Majesty OR

319 STF – Christ triumphant, ever reigning

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

689 STF – Summoned by the God who made us rich in our diversity OR

547 STF – Beyond these walls of worship

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

683 STF – Great is our redeeming Lord OR

356 STF – Jesus shall take the highest honour

Blessing

The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

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Call to worship

Here we are Lord, called together by your grace.

Here we are Lord, come to worship and praise you.

Here we are, connected by your Spirit.

May we notice you at work, in our midst, this and every day,

Amen.¹

Hymn:

552 STF – Here am I, Lord OR

463 STF – Deep in the shadows of the past OR

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.

O Lord, our God,

We come to you at the start of this time of worship, in a moment of prayer,

For ourselves, for our church and for our world.

Firstly, for ourselves, we pray for peace. We pray for peace for all of us who carry conflict, division and pain into this space today. Heal us, reconcile us, help us to know ourselves loved and forgiven, we pray.

[Pause]

As we pray for ourselves, O God, we also know we pray for a world in need, and specifically for those impacted by the conflict in the Middle East. In that context, O God, we pray peace.

Amongst those seeking peace are All We Can's humanitarian partner in the region, Compassion Protestant Society, a local Christian organisation who are working to bring peace, reconciliation and resilience in the region, whilst also supporting some of those most in need. All We Can and the Methodist Church's joint appeal has already trained 20 young people who are leading workshops focused on reconciliation and peace.

Just as there is hope there, O God, so too we give thanks for the hope we see in our own lives and communities.

As we worship, help us to be channels of that same hope, bringing others to see something of your love and your desire for all people to be reconciled to and through Christ Jesus, we pray

Amen.²

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by All We Can

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

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

You will need a large transparent jar or bowl, water (optional), 6 soft foam balls (that fit inside the container), labels on each of the balls: prophet, helper, teacher, encourager, giver, leader, kindness. Place everything inside the container.

In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul talks about all the different kinds of people who make up the church. The church has lots of different members and they each have their own purpose or function. Everyone isn't expected to be the same or do the same things!

Let's imagine this container is the church and find out what types of gifts and people there are... *(take each ball out and throw or pass to a person in the congregation. If using water, be aware that the balls are wet and people may be sprayed with droplets of water! This is part of the fun! Take it in turns for each person to read out what their ball says, giving a simple explanation or ask everyone what they think it means.)*

What a wide range of gifts and people there are! Paul tells us each person gives their own special talent or skill or ability for the benefit of everyone else in the church.

Now let's pass or (if you feel adventurous!) throw the balls to each other. If you receive one and think it describes you, shout "ME!" nice and loudly! Let's see if we can find out what gifts there are here... *(enjoy 'playing' this game together, if no one responds, people could name others they think have that particular gift or discuss in pairs which gift they would like to have).*

As we bring this to a close, let's return all the balls to the container (pass or bring them forward and place inside) being reminded that it is wonderful to know God has created us as unique human beings. And that as we are brought together in the church, God is with us, a bit like the water in the container. We are stronger together because God dwells among us and promises to never leave us.

Amen.³

Hymn:

691 STF – What shall our greeting be: sign or our unity? OR

116 STF – Sing for God's glory that colours the dawn of creation

Readings: Exodus 1:8 – 2:10; Psalm 124:1-8; Romans 12:1-8; Matthew 16:13-20

³ All Age Talk written by Gail Adcock

Hymn:

331 STF – King of kings, Majesty OR

319 STF – Christ triumphant, ever reigning

Reflections on the readings

Today we are thinking about three characters in the Bible and how they might be role models for us.

(You might want to tell a story about a role model of yours; someone the congregation will know, who has inspired you in some way.)

One of the three is very well known: Peter. He is special because he was one of the first followers of Jesus, and a founder of the church. But in a way, that is not really the most important point. It is historically interesting, of course, but we are going to focus on how his example shapes the church today. Peter is not around now, but we are, and we can continue his legacy.

In this passage, we see Peter at his best. He did not always have such a good record in the Bible. Like all of us, he was both brilliant and flawed at the same time. But today, we are looking at a highlight.

Alongside Peter, we are also going to think about the midwives in the Exodus story, Shiphrah and Puah. They are perhaps less well known, but they could be incredible role models for us.

Their story is inspirational and remarkable. Church history has sometimes minimised the female heroes in scripture, but their story has survived millennia of editing and retelling. It is striking that their names are recorded in the Bible, while the Pharaoh in the story is unnamed, drawing our attention to who really matters.

So we are going to think about three things from the example of Peter, Shiphrah and Puah: three things worth emulating.

First: they brought new things into the world

The midwives did this all the time. It was their job. They were there at the birth of babies, literally bringing new things into the world. They would have seen the beauty and fragility of so many new lives, and probably grieved many tragic losses too.

And the text tells us that God “dealt well” with them. After all, God is in the business of bringing new things into the world too.

Peter also helped bring something new into the world: the church, which is still going strong, and which we are all benefitting from today. This passage from Matthew’s Gospel recounts the conversation with Jesus where this is first spoken about.

Maybe it is helpful to think of Peter as a kind of midwife: there and present when the church was born at Pentecost. It was God’s initiative, but Peter helped in all kinds of practical ways when the church was at its newest, most fragile, and rapidly developing stage.

We can follow in the footsteps of Shiphrah, Puah and Peter, and bring new things into the world too: through art, writing, raising children, teaching, building, crafting, designing, befriending, discipling and evangelising, and much more.

Bringing things into the world that did not exist before is both thrilling and scary — but deeply good.

Question for reflection and conversation:

- What new things are you proud of bringing into the world?

Second: they used their hotline to God

Exodus tells us twice that the midwives “feared God”. This phrase is used in scripture to describe people who have an inner sense of what is right and good, and who live accordingly. Shiphrah and Puah knew God.

And the name used here is important: Elohim. This sets God apart from the gods of Egypt, and certainly from Pharaoh, who, though human, was treated as a god-king. The midwives had a connection to the true God.

Peter also had a hotline to God. When Jesus asked who he thought he was, Peter somehow knew that Jesus was not just a human ex-carpenter from Nazareth; he was the Christ: the one God had promised. And more than that, he named him as the Son of the God of Life — what a beautiful way to speak of God!

Jesus commended him for knowing this not because someone had told him, but because it had been revealed by God.

John Wesley spoke about our “spiritual senses”: our ability to sense God’s presence and action. The details are a bit mysterious, but you do have a hotline to God. You can speak to God in prayer, and you can also hear back.

It happens in different ways for different people. For some, it is a sense of clarity; for others, a sense of peace. For some, it is a strong sense of right and wrong. John Wesley described his heart being “strangely warmed”.

Question for reflection and conversation

- How do you sense God speaks to you?

Third: they resisted the onslaught of evil

When we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we ask that God will “deliver us from evil”, or sometimes “from the evil one”. It is a striking thing to pray, suggesting that there is real and present opposition to goodness and life. The Bible reminds us that followers of Jesus often find themselves caught in a spiritual struggle.

The midwives found themselves in a terrifying situation. Pharaoh attempted to eliminate a whole people, and Shiphrah and Puah were drawn into this plan.

When the command came to kill the newborn boys, they knew this went against everything they stood for. These professional life-bringers refused to become agents of death. So they resisted: an early example of faithful civil disobedience. They let the boys live.

When they were challenged, they told what we might call a “holy lie” — an explanation that protected life. And God approved of their actions. God is the God of life.

When Jesus told Peter that he would build the church on him, he was making a wordplay. In Greek, the words for Peter (Petros) and rock (Petra) are closely linked. In Aramaic, which Jesus likely spoke, they are even closer: kephas.

Jesus then said that the “gates of Hades” would not prevail against the church. This is usually understood as a reference to the forces of evil, the same kind of destructive power that the midwives resisted.

There is some debate about the wording here. Some suggest the phrase could also mean the “storms of Hades”, which connects with Jesus’ teaching about the house built on rock that withstands the storm.

Either way, the message is clear: we are not living in peacetime. The church faces real challenges. But we are not to be afraid, not to be “petrified”. With God’s help, we will stand firm and overcome. That is why we pray.

So may we all follow in the footsteps of Shiphrah, Puah and Peter:
bringing new life into the world,
attentive to what God is doing,
and resisting evil wherever we encounter it.

Amen.⁴

Hymn:

689 STF – Summoned by the God who made us rich in our diversity OR

547 STF – Beyond these walls of worship

Prayers of intercession

Let us pray.

Loving God,
you are the source of all life,
and you are always bringing new things into being.

We pray for your world.
Where life is fragile, protect it.
Where people are in danger, defend them.
Where there is grief and loss, bring comfort and hope.

We give thanks for all who help bring new life and creativity into the world:
for parents and carers,
for teachers and artists,
for builders, makers and healers,
and for all who nurture others with care and compassion.

Help each of us to play our part
in bringing life, hope and goodness into your world.

God of wisdom,
you speak to your people in many ways,
and you invite us to know you more deeply.

We pray for the church,
here and across the world.
Help us to listen for your voice,
to be attentive to your Spirit,
and to recognise your presence in our daily lives.

We pray for those who feel distant from you,
or unsure how to hear you.
Bring clarity where there is confusion,
peace where there is anxiety,
and courage where there is uncertainty.

⁴ Reflection written by Andy Fisburne

Like Peter, and like Shiphrah and Puah,
help us to trust in what you reveal,
and to follow where you lead.

God of justice and peace,
you call us to stand against all that harms and destroys.

We pray for situations of injustice in our world,
for places where power is misused,
where people are oppressed,
and where evil seems strong.

We pray for those who have the courage to resist:
for those who speak out,
for those who protect the vulnerable,
and for those who refuse to take part in wrongdoing.

Give us wisdom to recognise what is right,
and courage to act, even when it is costly.
Strengthen your church to stand firm —
not afraid, but trusting in your power and your love.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

For all that we have received, O God we are thankful, and we take a moment to thank you today.

As part of our thanks, we offer these tokens back to you – and we pray your blessing on these gifts, freely given in response to grace. May they be put to use for the work of your mission here on earth, we pray.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

683 STF – Great is our redeeming Lord OR

356 STF – Jesus shall take the highest honour

Blessing

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
We step out into a world full of abuses of power and posturing about strength,
And turn to you, for a different model of leadership, an alternative conversation about power, a commitment to peace, always.
Help us to follow in your way, this week, we pray

Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Andy Fisburne

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker